

PROPHETIC PROCLAMATION: EMPOWERING CONGREGANTS
TOWARD A CHRIST-CENTERED MARRIAGE
THROUGH SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Pamela T. Barnes-Jackson

BS, Central State University, 1999
MEd, Central State University, 2012

Mentors

Robert C. Walker, DMin
Kenneth W. Cummings, DMin

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ABSTRACT

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By

Pamela T. Barnes-Jackson

United Theological Seminary, 2016

Mentors

Robert C. Walker, D.Min.

Kenneth W. Cummings, D.Min

This project sought to move individuals toward Christ-centered marriage at Light of the Community Christian Church where the researcher was Co-Pastor. Some congregants were single, unwed parents living together or raising children born out of wedlock, which was problematic for the church not just the community. If through the spiritual formation of individuals, Christ-centered relationships could be established, then it could impact a prophetic call to restore marriage as God intended. The collection of qualitative data was taken from pre and post surveys, observation and evaluation forms. The data suggested positive impact on participants and their attitude toward Christ-centered marriage.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researcher gives all glory, honor and praise to God through Jesus Christ who extended grace and mercy in order to run this race and complete it in God's time. What the devil meant for naught, God meant it for good, and I extol thee oh God, for you are the lover of my soul. I give glory to Jesus Christ who died to set me free and to be who God formed me to become. To my husband and Pastor, Willie, I thank you from the bottom of my heart and cannot express the gratitude and appreciation for your love and support throughout this process. You sacrificed your time, energy, and effort and I am so grateful.

Thanks to the flock of Light of the Community Christian Church for being a part of this project. Thank you United Theological Seminary school administrators, instructors, librarians, and other staff members for directing me through the Doctor of Ministry process. To all of my mentors, Dr. Robert Walker, Dr. Kenneth Cummings, Sr., Dr. Richard L. Eslinger, and Dr. Michael Neil thank you for your guidance and wisdom. To my Faculty Consultants Dr. Rachel Magdelene, Dr. Elise Eslinger, and Dr. Leroy Cothran, I thank you for your consultation throughout this project.

I acknowledge my father and mother, the late William E. and Lucy J. Guy who raised me in a Christian home and educated me in the ways of the Lord they would be proud of my accomplishments. They are looking down from heaven along with my grandmothers, Nanny and Granny, Aunt Mae, and my father-in-law, Alfred; saying praise the Lord!

To my Professional Associates: Rev. Dr. Gloria Dillon, D.Min.; Rev. Dr. Cleveland Houser, D.Min; Dr. Willie J. Barnes, Ph.D, Rev. Dr. Angela Edwards,

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To my mother-in-law, Wanda M. Anderson, thank you is definitely not enough for all the times you traveled, cooked, lodged, made phone calls of encouragement, prayed, may God continue to bless and keep you. I impart to my fourteen grandchildren that it is never too late to learn, remember the words of Horace Mann, a great visionary who conveyed, “education is the great equalizer”, reach for the stars!

DEDICATION

To my husband, mentor, and Pastor, Willie, who worked tirelessly alongside me in order to see God's project through to fruition. This project is dedicated to all those individuals struggling with establishing a relationship with Christ: single parents, unwed mothers and fathers. God is the answer and Jesus Christ is the way. Make the commitment to allow God to transform you and take you to the next level. Change is a small word, but it can do big things for you.

Christ has no body but yours, No hands, no feet on earth but yours, Yours are the eyes through which His compassion will look upon the world; Yours are the feet with which He will go about doing good; Yours are the hands with which He will bless all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, Yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

–Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*

INTRODUCTION

Marriage matters because it was established in the Garden of Eden by God between Adam and Eve. However, in the church today we see some young men and women living together and having babies together but not exploring the commitment of marriage. It would seem that the church is now experiencing what is becoming a more common experience in this postmodern world; a lack of value when it comes to the idea or institution of marriage as God intended.

Kenneth Copeland explains regarding the institution of marriage; “The marriage union is the closest relationship that can exist between two human beings. When a man and woman decide to join together in marriage, they should do so with full realization of their responsibilities. Marriage is serious business. When two born-again believers know it is God’s will for them to marry, they come together before God, a minister and witnesses to join their hearts and lives.”¹ There are some congregants raising children born out of wedlock, as single parents or unwed couples. They seem to lack the necessary spiritual formation that would allow them to establish Christ-centered relationships toward marriage. Copeland acknowledges, the couple must be in the will of God.

Because of the lack of commitment to each other or marriage, the problem of improper, inappropriate and unstable relationships leading to unwed single mothers and

¹ Kenneth Copeland, *A Ceremony of Marriage* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publishers, 1978), 3.

fathers was examined. The use of Christian education on the spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible study, meditation and reflection through journaling, could empower congregants toward healthy, committed and Christ-centered relationships. This model may benefit other churches and communities which may be experiencing similar situations. If the spiritual disciplines could bring about spiritual formation then there could be a favorable outcome for these individuals and families. The intent of this project is to bring about spiritual formation within the congregants; in order to measure attitudinal change in their out-look pertaining to a Christ-centered relationship toward marriage. Why does marriage matter? Because it was ordained, favored, and blessed by God.

Inner transformation is a necessary step in helping individuals understand that establishing and maintaining a Christ-centered relationship is paramount to ensuring stability and permanence in their lives. Essentially, change is vital and a fundamental part of gaining spirituality. An individual's conversion from living a life with no established boundaries toward a more restricted and limited lifestyle can be quite a hurdle to jump. Congregants staying the course, not allowing themselves to engage in relationships that hold no value or significance to God, could bring restoration of the family and return them to living by the Word of God. Their Christ-centeredness in relationships could re-establish God's righteous seed in the world through marriage, restoration of the holy family.

The Old Testament tells of an improper relationship in Genesis 38:11-19, between Judah and Tamar. Their situation was so stressful that it made for a bad relationship between them. Tamar's husbands died and she wanted to adhere to customs by

remarrying within the family and raising children. The first two sons of Judah were not faithful to God and were killed. This left Tamar a widow and was given a promise of marrying Judah's youngest son. Judah suggesting that Tamar stay with her father until his youngest son Shelah was of age, showed that he had no intentions of remaining faithful to Tamar and the tradition of marrying the brother of her deceased husband. However, his negating to call for her when his son was of age thwarted any good intentions of faithfulness. The extreme measures Tamar took in presenting herself as a harlot to her father-in-law and becoming pregnant by him; she was desperate, through it all, she trusted Judah and remained faithful in honoring her first husband with a child. When all surfaced in the matter, and Tamar was about to be killed, Judah came forward and stated Tamar to be more honorable than he, therefore the sentence of death was revoked.

Young men and women today find themselves with partners that have no faith and do not acknowledge God's values in the relationship. Herein lies the quandary, these individuals recognize that their partner is not like-minded; yet the relationship continues until a child or children result from their union. What happens next? Like Tamar who desired to have a child and a home, and did not want to return home dishonored made what might be considered in this day a bad decision. Some women find themselves today doing the same or similar things. She decided to lay with her father in law and get pregnant. Deceit was her only hope for having a child. She gave up the idea of having a husband, but she was not going to give up having a child no matter the cost. Some women resolve to have children to keep the man, even in the absence of the commitment of marriage. At times, many of them do not even keep the man after having the child.

In this postmodern world, some women and men also find themselves in the position of being widowed and having to make a decision about how their faith will affect their future decisions about remarrying or remaining single. They themselves should remain faithful to God until time to re-establish themselves in a new family, if that is their wish.

According to Scripture, Judah made a promise that he did not keep, giving Tamar his word of marriage to his son Shelah and not following through on his word. Tamar understood the advantage and gain of having a husband and children; she also did not want to bring shame on her family. Some young men and women today find themselves spurned and rejected by their families and the church. In some cases made to feel inadequate and unworthy of the love of God due to their lifestyles. In this narrative, Tamar took a great risk through act of prostitution. She understood the cost and that it could end gravely. She had a plan for a journey with Judah that involved having the child she wanted however it could have easily turned into humiliation and possibly lost her life. The story of Judah and Tamar exemplifies the complications that arose from broken promises and a lack of Christ-centeredness and scriptural (biblical) values leading toward marriage. Becoming Christ-centered is essential and crucial to individuals and could be the step toward a marriage as God intended.

The New Testament, in the Book of John, 2:1-9, gives insightful revelation regarding the first sign (miracle) that Jesus performed was at the wedding in Cana when he turned water into wine. The significance of having Jesus attend the wedding was great in the sense that the miracle would never have taken place if Jesus had not been there. The wedding and ceremony would not have been complete without the miracle of Jesus

creating more wine. In like manner, without Christ being at the center of every marriage it could be met with disaster.

God is speaking through Scripture and the experiences of believers; proclaiming to church leaders and church administrators that marriage matters and that it is time to get back to the fundamental relationships established in the Garden of Eden by God. God wants Christian leaders to take action toward teaching congregations and individuals the necessity for Christ-centeredness in relationships in order for them to get back to committing themselves to marriage, covenantal love, and holy families. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 sums marriage up, “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.”² In order for couples to return to the will of God in their relationships while learning to value marriage as God intended, some spiritual formation will need to take place, and that begins and ends with God.

A prophetic proclamation, calling people to return to Christ-centered relationship could manifest, however spiritual formation begins with God overflowing into the Pastor. The overflow, by preaching and teaching the congregants, could have the potential of the transformation of a conversion of accepting and living a more Christian life. The minister’s spiritual formation should spill over into the congregation and as God spiritually forms them, the descent of the Holy Spirit sets them on fire for God. Their formation overflows into their families’ lives, into their children and into their communities.

² Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, NRSV.

Some spiritual disciplines were a major contributor to the growth and healing of the researcher. Christian education and Bible study allowed for a better relationship with Jesus and brought forth a different mind-set, just as the prodigal son woke up when he found himself eating out of a pig trough. Scripture instructs parents to teach children in the ways of God helping them to understand the path they should follow. Although the path of the world tugs heavy on our youth and congregants, it is better to have taught them through Christian education than the contrary. This model in dealing with Christ-centered marriage begins with being Christ-centered, which is an important step for children to learn about commitment in relationships toward marriage, families, and covenantal love, even at an early age.

This Christ-centered marriage model was based on Christian education and provided instruction and training to six congregants while utilizing the spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible study, meditation and reflection through journaling. The spiritual disciplines were critical in the spiritual formation of the researcher in establishing a Christ-centered relationship which led to a Christ-centered marriage.

Chapter One is the ministry focus; it covers the researcher's spiritual journey, context, synergy, and sharing the experiences and gifts to ministry the researcher brings to the local church. The researcher used this context for the project and provided Christian Education as a tool in teaching spiritual disciplines to participating congregants with the hope of moving them toward marriage as God intended, with Christ at the center.

Chapter Two shares the state of the art in this ministry project. This section presents theories on the subject of Christ-centered relationships toward marriage. Some

of the models visited were on counseling, pre and post marriage, forty day challenges for couples and singles, keys to biblical renewal, spiritual formation and the spiritual disciplines. Marjorie Thompson in *Soul Feast* teaches individuals how to incorporate the spiritual disciplines into their lives whereby allowing spiritual formation to occur within them. Stephen Arterburn and David Stoop wrote *Seven Keys to Spiritual Renewal*, in their book they discuss seven keys; surrender, acceptance, confession, ownership, forgiveness, transformation and preservation toward a renewed spirit. Joseph Walker III wrote about love and intimacy and how to absorb both aspects into the life of an individual or couple and who they are to God. The researcher discusses her review of the models considered for this project and her rationale behind the choices she made.

Chapter three is the core of the paper and shares the foundational research compiled from a set of Biblical, theological, and historical resources dealing with relationships and marriage. The Old Testament biblical text of Genesis 38: 11-19 and the New Testament text of John 2: 1-9 offer the researcher Scripture for exegesis. Genesis gives account of Judah and Tamar and the war that raged between them dealing with marriage and offspring. Yet, John gives account of how crucial it is for Jesus to be at the wedding. With Jesus at the wedding, all things can be fixed.

Historically marriage has gone through a quagmire of changes. It has gone from the original concept in the Garden of Eden to multiple wives, common law, living together, and having children born out of wedlock. Edward Wimberley wrote about *Moving From Shame to Self-Worth* and teaches that God works with each and everyone in moving them to a place of value, that everyone is valuable to God. This is a part of a

holistic healing. Pope John Paul II wrote about *The Family* and communicated that the bond of love is the symbol of the covenant that binds God and the people.

Theologically, Emma Justes wrote about *Hearing Beyond The Words*. Hearing is a two-way street. As Pastors we have to hear the people and we have to listen as well. In order to be able to be a bridge between the congregant and Jesus, Pastors should ensure they understand what the congregant is experiencing and make certain they are not shunned. Marjorie Thompson in *Soul Feast* invites individuals to understand their inner transformational journey toward their spiritual growth and maturity in the faith. In the book *Real Faith for Real Life: Living the Six Marks of Discipleship*, Michael W. Foss talks about the inward reflection and how it frees ones heart to love someone else. The church should teach people to love while learning to love themselves, making space for loving another entering their life. Norma Cook Everist in *The Church as Learning Community* involves Pastors and congregants living as mentors and models in the community in order for the individuals within that community to see and interact with the church. Jackie Nowak is involved with “The Blessing Center” at Southminster Presbyterian Church which invites children to come and learn how to pray, teach them how to worship, holy listening, and hospitality. They are taught how to stay in a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. This chapter informs the reader that it is time to get back to the holy state of matrimony.

Chapter Four offers the method utilized in this project. The researcher made use of pre and post surveys, Participant and Contextual Associates Observation Forms and Participant Evaluation Forms. The hypothesis is shared along with the Intervention. It covers the steps that were taken to expand and developed the participants through the

spiritual disciplines. The goal of the project was to measure attitudinal change pertaining to Christ-centered relationships and marriage, through empowering the participants with a sound Biblical foundation. The instrumentation utilized will show triangulation, validity, and reliability. The design, measurement, and instrumentation of the project are given, with the timeline, schedule, and means of evaluation. The method of implementation of the project, the collection of data, and evaluation of the results were also included.

Chapter Five deals with the researcher's field experience and an analysis of the data retrieved. The researcher will provide results from the Christ-centered Marriage training and explore the information, conclusions, and the outcomes of the project.

Finally, Chapter Six culminates with reflections, summary and conclusions. The researcher will give insight regarding what future projects could emanate from this model. This chapter shares the researcher's final thoughts, theological lessons learned, inner transformation, and how the spiritual disciplines played an intrinsic role in the project. The researcher will express her views of the success of the project and her reason to support it.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

The Researcher

The Reverend Pamela T. Barnes-Jackson was born in Dayton, Ohio to proud parents William and Lucy Guy, active members in the church. Being raised in a Christian home was very rewarding. There were five children and all sang with their father for events, special programs, church teas, weddings, and songfests. From a very early point in her childhood, being in church was almost like being at home.

Upon her reflection, church attendance was regular, Even so, there was not a close relationship with God. There seemed a lack of spirituality which appeared to be a surface faith. She was baptized at the age of thirteen. It was a joyful day, but she did not understand what was happening. In retrospect, she understood that loving the Lord was great, but there had to be more than that. The Bible states that when Jesus was baptized in the Jordan, the Holy Spirit came upon Him. Yet when the Pastor submerged Pamela into the baptism pool, seemingly the Holy Spirit did not descend upon her. There was no feeling of euphoria as expected. This was problematic for her, so she thought maybe it would come later on in life. Sunday school, while a great foundation for her attempt at understanding, was not taught in a way that allowed for her to have a clear comprehension. Because of her experiences as a youth and young adult growing up in

church, she believes now that some individuals go to church, but much of the time they seem superficial and shallow. Her experience has been that parents can only give what they were taught and retained; she recognizes that individuals have to learn for themselves what it takes to be saved and have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Throughout junior high school, life stayed the same for Pamela. However, when she approached high school, she craved a deeper relationship with God, yet she felt as if she did not have the wisdom to approach that deeper relationship. Among the lessons learned in high school was the fact that people were not always a friend although they claimed otherwise. Overall, many families were broken. There was simply a lack of committed relationships. There also seemed to be a lot of unplanned youth pregnancies. This was a pivotal point in Pamela's life. She had an awakening of harsh realities and became aware of an environment that differed from which was raised in.

After graduation from high school Pamela was offered and accepted a job at the Air Force base. After a few weeks, a young military man caught her eye and they had lunch together. Pamela had gone through high school and never had a boyfriend and was very naïve. She and her new friend became very engrossed with each other and found themselves dealing with an unplanned pregnancy. Although she loved God and understood she should have waited until after marriage to become sexually active, in her mind and based on her feelings it was not an option. Her actions were shameful and an embarrassment to her family. Her boyfriend asked for her hand in marriage so it was planned, arranged, and accomplished.

Once the marriage took place her new husband informed her he did not believe in God and would not allow her to attend church anymore. The thought of not attending church was troubling but she got over it and consented to be whatever her husband wanted her to become. Physical abuse crept into the relationship and was a game changer. In retrospect, her experience was common to what many people do today. They do not take time to find out about the person they are in a relationship with and wind up learning the hard way, eventually leading to heartbreak. Thirteen years and four children later, Pamela found herself getting a divorce and moving back home. She could not wait to get back to church, back to re-establishing a solid relationship with God and maintaining that union.

Her marriage commitment and heart was broken but her love for God was stronger. Through it all, Pamela became a better person, a better Christian, more sensitive, transformed, and an emancipated believer in God. Overflowing with the excitement of returning to church, she dressed the children up and they all went to church together for the first time in thirteen years. When they walked through the door of the church everybody embraced them with hugs and kisses. It was such a good feeling for them to be back in church. After returning to church the researcher met a young man, they fell in love, got married and to their union two children were born. From their six children, they were blessed with fourteen grandchildren, the blessing of Abraham.

Although the marriage was a good match, they both had issues from their previous marriages that were brought into the marriage. They never allowed themselves time to heal from their previous relationships. They carried this pain around with them and the pain became a part of who they were. The only way to rid themselves of the pain

inside was to release it on each other. God was always a part of their lives, and as the hurt eventually wore off, they finally began leaning on each other for support.

As Co-Pastor of Light of the Community Christian Church, she believed God is strategic in, and places you, in the right place at the right time. She was not saying that God wanted her to be in those past situations. However, through the decisions she made, it was understood that people are flawed and sinful. In fact, she was flawed and sinful. Jesus was the only perfect individual. Upon her pregnancy she understood for the first time, that people should not be treated like outcasts. She was a normal person, not better than other people as she was bought up to believe. In turn, she did not know how to handle this revelation. After all, she was told what not to do, but was never told what to do if found in the same predicament.

Reflecting back on her journey she was reminded of the poem by Mary Stevenson “Footprints in the Sand.” When the traveler was going through all of the issues and problems, the traveler looked down and only saw one set of footprints, the traveler asked God, why is it that you were not there when I was going through my trials and tribulations, God said to the traveler, there were only one set of footprints in the sand because I was carrying you. In realizing God was carrying her through the bad times, it gave her the sense of peace she needed, that God was always with her.

As Co-Pastor, her schedule was just as busy as the Sr. Pastor. Her duties included evangelism and outreach, providing order to the worship service, preaching every other Sunday and assisting the Pastor in any way she could. The model of ministry that was being birthed in her was a ministry based on broken relationships and the potential mentoring of non-covenantal couples living their lives without being centered on Christ.

When looking at where God has brought her from, she is a living witness that God truly changes things and people and transforms lives. God only chooses the best, and although she has been through so many difficulties, it did not mean that God did not want her to succeed, God was always pulling for her, but through her mistakes, trials and temptations, she emerged as a stronger person, parent, and Christian.

She is a living witness to be able to impart and train individuals about how developing a relationship with God should come first in their life. Through submission to God, those individuals should allow God to bring someone into their lives which could lead to commitment and a successful relationship. When turning away from God, one must understand there are consequences to every action. Yet God was committed to her, and knew her heart and her fears. He never left her, even in her darkest hours.

When choosing her husbands, she made the best decisions possible due to immaturity and her level of decision making. She has been married to her current spouse for over 28 years. We celebrated our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary by renewing our wedding vows on March 3, 2012. Our marriage has been a struggle, but through commitment and our willingness to forgive, we forgave each other and God has been in our midst every step of the way. It is amazing how God works, Pamela believes life is all about love and forgiveness. After all, if Jesus can forgive the world while hanging on the cross, who is she not to forgive?

God made a breakthrough in her life when God called her husband into the ministry. One day, he came home and informed her he had gone into the ministry. She said, “that is good for you. He called you, not me!” In God’s time Light of the Community Christian Church opened in January 2005. She was content to be a helpmate

and supporter to her husband and Pastor, little did she realize that God had something in store for her as well.

The church has gone through some growth issues over the years. Membership both increased and decreased. Light of the Community had quite a few Assistant Pastors, none of which stayed and endured the ups and downs. They only stayed for a season. God was nudging her all along. She believed God might be calling her to assist her husband as a good “First Lady.” When God called, she pulled back. She realized that God would not give up on her. In September 2009, she heard God speaking and accepted her calling into the ministry. The first ladies she had previously known never stepped into the position as Co-Pastor with their husbands. This was a new idea and a new venture. She later realized God was calling her with an all or nothing request. Pamela wanted to be obedient. Therefore when God told her she was ready to enter into this next phase of her journey, still as God pulled toward the right, she kept going left. She was afraid to talk in front of people, did not have the education, and had not lived a life worthy to be called. One day, God sent a message to her from one of God’s ministers, who said to her, “God calls those that have not led the most perfect lives. God calls those that have been on the other side of the track.” Satan would tell her anything, but God’s voice was louder and stronger. God continued to call her until she said yes.

After Pamela surrendered she made the decision to go back to college and obtain a degree to further my education. After pursuing a Master of Education degree, God moved her to go to Seminary to work on a Doctor of Ministry degree. Pamela preached her first sermon on Christmas Sunday, December 2009. She was licensed by Light of the Community Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) on October 13, 2010 and ordained by

Bishop and Co-Pastor Maddox, thru Covenant Partners International/Exodus Ministries on April 29, 2011. This was the highlight of her life along with being baptized, having a covenantal-relationship, and the birth of her children.

She has been compared to the weeping prophet Jeremiah. She believes that is okay because the Bible clearly states that Jesus wept. Through her pain, suffering and crying many times, she does not view it as bad. She feels the tears are a release of all the drama that has taken place. Like a waterfall, the tears are liberating and allow her to let go of their pain and suffering which heals her.

She would like to minister to women and men about covenantal love and mutuality and the importance of commitment to each other being a gift from God. As a result of her past pain and suffering, she feels drawn to impart this knowledge to her brothers and sisters. She now realizes that when one suffers, the devil loves it. When one hurts themselves and others, the devil is happy. Abuse is a choice; it is easy to hurt people. When Jesus said in Matthew 25:40 should ring throughout our memories that “what you do to the least of these you do to me.” Her life has been a testimony that she wants to share. She now understands that humans have a sinful nature and need Jesus Christ to help come to repentance, salvation, and reconciliation unto God. In working out our own salvation and helping others, all should learn to hate the sin, but love the sinner.

She and her husband are Co-Pastors of Light of the Community Christian Church. They are new church planters for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). When looking at where God brought her from, she recognizes that she is a witness to the fact that God truly changes people and transforms lives. God made a breakthrough in her life when God called her and her husband into the ministry.

The Context

Light of the Community Christian Church opened its doors on January 5, 2005 at the Fairview Middle School on Philadelphia Drive. The school has since been demolished. The current church is located in the beautiful city of Dayton, Ohio which has a dense population of approximately 141,837.¹ It is located within the Five Oaks and Santa Clara neighborhoods, 45405 and 45406 zip codes. The community where the church is located is in the Northwest part of the City of Dayton, Ohio. Current population within a mile radius of the church is approximately 14,810.² Light of the Community does not own a church building. It is nesting within another house of worship. The Church rented space in the 200 Delaware Avenue building just over a year before Exodus Ministries decided to purchase the building. It has rented space in this dwelling now for five years. Exodus Ministries asked us to continue renting space after they purchased the 200 Delaware Avenue property. This was as an opportunity and the break we had been looking for and the church continued to rent space there. Church worship service was displaced from 11:00 a.m. to a 2:00 p.m. time slot every Sunday. The church is in meditation and discernment as God speaks to them in determining a church home for their congregation. The church is an African-American congregation, membership of thirty-one, averaging about fifteen in attendance per week. The member's age range is between fifteen months to seventy-four years old.

¹ Accessed thru Link2Lead which provided report from Percept.
http://www.google.com/publicdata/explore?ds=kf7tgg1uo9ude_&met_y=population&idim=place:3921000&dl=en&hl=en&q=what+is+the+population+of+dayton,+ohio (accessed September 2012).

² Percept Group, Inc. "First View 2012", P1, page 4, Census Bureau, Nielson, v21.1a (accessed September 2012). <http://www.ministryarea.com/Reports/ReportViewer.aspx?id=f1902862-50e9-4f2f-92aa-45cc19c72821>.

Light of the Community is affiliated with two organizations. The first organization is the denominational affiliation with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). We are considered a new church plant, and Pastor and Co-Pastor Barnes-Jackson are new church planters. The second affiliation is with Covenant Partners International, a network of ministers collaborating to assist each other in association and relationship through a godly vision and mission. The Bishop and his Co-Pastor wife are the founders of Covenant Partners International and their members consist of several congregations within the Dayton, OH area, meeting once a month to strategize and enlarge God's labor field.

The church opened its doors with four members, the Pastor and now Co-Pastor Barnes-Jackson along with their two children. The opening worship service had over two hundred in attendance and the majority of them were visitors who were there to support them. After the initial worship service, seven people attended. Although there were only seven in attendance, the presence of God surrounded the congregation, and shouts of hallelujah rang out.

The Pastors were very much engaged in the church in education and in each other. The senior Pastor was preparing for graduation from United Theological Seminary in May 2013. He is a dynamic, outgoing, loving and spiritually minded individual. His love for the church and its people were a motivating factor for his now Co-Pastor. She graduated from Central State University as a recipient of her Bachelor of Science in Business Administration degree and her Master of Education degree. The Co-Pastor was excited about ministry and learned everything from her senior Pastor. The relationship between Pastors is phenomenal. Their individual love for God is unified as one love and

their love for the church grows more and more every day. Their favorite Scripture is “Surely, to obey is better than sacrifice.”³

“The area is diverse and the dynamics level is extremely high, in other words, as the population density and overall diversity increase, and transitional, the environment becomes more complex and challenging. Basically it is how much the community changes. The neighborhoods surrounding Light of the Community Christian Church is extremely urban and transitional. The communities have an abundance of homes that have been abandoned. Most of the properties are not well kept. Violence plays a major role in the surrounding church communities. Household concerns in this population include racial and ethnic prejudice, affordable housing, adequate food, employment opportunities, neighborhood crime and safety and social injustice.”⁴ Drugs are sold on the street corners and in front of the church. There are prostitutes standing on corners, gun shots ring out during church service.

The overall stress level conditions in this area placing the children at risk are at an overall high. Some characteristics known to have contributed to community these problems: households below the poverty line, adults without a high school diploma, single mother households, family problems and the lack of basic necessities such as food, housing and jobs. Households below poverty \$15,000 a year are 28 percent. Households with single mothers with children 62 percent, adult population of high school dropouts 17

³ 1 Samuel 15:22 (NRSV).

⁴ Percept Group, Inc. “First View 2012”, C1, page 5, Census Bureau, Nielson (accessed September 2012). <http://www.ministryarea.com/Reports/ReportViewer.aspx?id=f1902862-50e9-4f2f-92aa-45cc19c72821> Accessed thru Link2Lead which provided report from Precept.

percent, primary concerns for food, housing and jobs 26 percent, primary family concerns, 26 percent and primary community concerns 18 percent.⁵ Light of the Community Christian Church has never experienced any crime related issues.

The family structure at Light of the Community Christian Church includes three single mothers with children, (two are living with the father of the children) and two married couples. In the community, a one mile radius surrounding the church, “there are 49 percent single women with children, 21 percent divorced or widowed, and married 30 percent. How educated are the communities which encircle the church, based on the number of years completed and college enrollment, the overall education level in the area is very low. Less than high school 17 percent, high school 31 percent, some college 33 percent, college graduate 12 percent and post graduate 7 percent.”⁶

The faces of diversity entail the lifestyle of the community surrounding Light of the Community Christian Church. There are six segment groupings, affluent families -1 percent, middle American families 11 percent, young and coming 1 percent, rural families 6 percent, senior life 1 percent and ethnic and urban diversity account for 81 percent. Racially, African Americans represent the largest group in the community at 72 percent, Anglo 21 percent, Hispanic 3 percent, Asian 1 percent and Native American/other 4 percent. Hispanic/Latinos are projected to be the fastest growing group increasing by 4.5 percent between 2012 and 2017. The major generational groups represented are Millennials (ages 22 to 30) who make up 29 percent of the total population. Generation Z (ages 0 to 10) account for 16 percent, Survivors (ages 31 to 51)

⁵ Percept Group, Inc. “First View 2012”, C2, page 5.

⁶ Percept Group, Inc. “First View 2012”, D5, page 5

make up 30 percent, Boomers (ages 52 to 69) account for 19 percent, Silents (ages 70 to 87) make up 6 percent and Builders (ages 88 & up) account for 1 percent of the population.⁷

Data detailing the defined study area address the current population and projections through 2017. As stated earlier, currently there are 14,810 persons residing in a one mile radius around the church. This represents a decline since 1990 by 9,221 or 38.4 percent. An interesting fact shows that the US as a whole grew by 25.9 percent. The 1990 Census population was 24,031, in the 2000 Census population was 21,094, 2017 projected Census population 13,427. The population in this area is not projected to grow. The population is projected to decrease by 9.3 percent or 1,383 persons. The actual change from 1999 to 2000 was -12 percent, actual change from 2000 to 2012 was -30% and projected change from 2012 to 2017 is -9 percent.⁸

Light of the Community Christian Church has a Vision and Mission Statement. The church vision is to establish a community worship center throughout Dayton and the Miami Valley. We are an inclusive, multi-cultural church affirmed in our purpose to make disciples in our community. We strive to teach all to be godly, Christ-like, faithful and evangelistic while becoming visionaries, liberators and prosperous. Our Mission statement, "Our mission is to foster love in the Dayton community by spiritually reaching all types of families, and working to correct oppressive behavior and situations through reconciliation unto God."

⁷ Percept Group, Inc. "First View 2012", D1, page 4.

⁸ Percept Group, Inc. "First View 2012", P1, page 4

Light of the Community Christian Church recently went through church renewal and growth training sessions. The sessions lasted for six weeks and covered six disciplines, bible study, meditation, humility, prayer, fasting, and service. Through the training sessions the individuals were taught how to grow spiritually. The church wants to be effective in evangelizing, witnessing and teaching in the surrounding community. Prior to the training congregants attended church on Sunday. On one particular Sunday, the Pastors taught James 2:26 “You see then that a man is justified by works and not by faith only.”⁹ The members were so focused on themselves, and neglected what Jesus taught them to do, “Go, make disciples.”¹⁰ The congregation grumbled through the planning of the sessions, regarding from what time and day to have the training however after the training, the congregation had truly been transformed in their ideology and committed themselves to help the church in whatever method needed. The Pastor of Light of the Community Christian Church explained it in this way, “Spiritual formation occurs, when your desire to learn displays your willingness to grow.”¹¹

Since the training, a Leadership Council has been established. There are seven members involved and committed to God and to the council. The Pastor serves as Superintendent of Christian Education, G.O.D. (Gentlemen of Distinction), President of the Board of Directors and Chairperson for the Information Technology (Website Ministry). The Co-Pastor serves as Chairperson over worship, L.O.V.E Club (Ladies of Virtue and Empowerment), Chairperson of Evangelism & Outreach, School Partnership

⁹ James 2:26. (NKJV).

¹⁰ Matthew 28:19. (NKJV).

¹¹ Willie J. Barnes-Jackson, Sermon, Light of the Community Christian Church, Dayton, OH, Pastor.

Program and Light of the Community Christian Church is responsible for helping at an Elementary School in the city of Dayton, OH. The church prays for the school and provides students with school supplies, visits, and reads with the children twice a month. Other offices include: Pastor's Aide, Church Trustees, President of Congregation, Chairperson of Benevolence, Church Secretary, Facilities Coordinator, Director of Christian Education (Spiritual Formation Training Ministry), Financial Secretary, Information Technology Coordinator, President of the Usher Board, President of Deacon, Deaconess and Jr. Deacon/Deaconess board, Stewardship President, Youth Director & Programs Coordinator, Director of Service and Hospitality. Light of the Community Christian Church members have grown into the above positions and each individual takes their position seriously.

The diversity of the church has altered a few times since its beginning. As Light of the Community Christian Church launched, the congregation was African American. As time passed, the congregation took on a different essence, the church was fifty percent African American and Caucasian. After that it became fifty percent gay and fifty percent heterosexual with a mixture of all ages with black and white attendees. The reasoning behind the mix of diversity, was due to us not having our own building or worship center. Due to renting space and contract expirations, the membership fluctuated as did offering and tithing. The lack of consistency made it difficult for the church to maintain its presence at some locations. Therefore, depending on the location we were in, the culture of the church took on that particular location's cultural identity. The dynamics of the church were at times great, due to the amount of congregants, there was more attention

given to them. It has more of a family atmosphere, one that has a more personal touch, a hands-on relationship.

The spirit of Light of the Community Christian Church is one of vigor, excellence and gratefulness. The church has come a long way since it opened its doors in January 2005. The road has been long and arduous. Even so, the church doors remain open, ready to accept weary travelers on their spiritual journey with arms open wide to embrace them, and through the love for God, remain faithful to the end.

The Synergy

There are three synergy points that intersect from the researcher's journey and context: they are spiritual formation, Christian education, and Christ-centered marriage. The journey for Rev. Pamela has been remarkable and how the synergy interconnects is awesome. Spiritual formation for this project is the forming of an individual who is ready, willing, and able to be molded, shaped, and formed for God to use them. Michael Burer, an Assistant Professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, imparts spiritual formation as "the intentional transformation of the inner person to the character of Christ."¹² Kenneth Berding wrote an article *At the Intersection of Mission and Spiritual Formation in the letters of Paul*, Berding conveys, "My working definition for spiritual formation is: The process by which one's affections, thoughts, and actions become increasingly conformed to Christ."¹³ Both Burer and

¹² Michael Burer, "Towards a Biblical Definition of Spiritual Formation: Romans 12: 1-2", Bible.org., February 9, 2007. accessed February 27, 2014, <https://bible.org/seriespage/towards-biblical-definition-spiritual-formation-romans-121-2>.

¹³ Kenneth Berding, "At the Intersection of Mission and Spiritual Formation in the Letters of Paul", *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 6, no. 1 (May, 2013): p18.

Berding agree by conforming to Christ's character the person can change and transform their life. For this project, spiritual formation advocates the willingness of the individual to change from a self journey to a more Christ-centered journey. The spirituality aspect of an individual from being self-centered to choosing to walk with Jesus could be the mystical passage toward transformation.

The Christian education portion of this project has many significant avenues of approach. Individuals must be taught in church the things that happen not only in the Bible, but how the Word could be utilized when obstacles and issues come into their life, Church's have the potential to instruct their congregants on worldly issues, but some choose not to do so. This is where the model of empowering congregants through Christian education could aid in their spiritual formation for relationships with and beyond the church. Secular relationships have taken precedence over spiritual or Christ-centered relationships. When what goes on inside the church begins looking like what goes on outside the church, serious problems arise. In the book of Revelation, Jesus' address to John pertaining to the church in Thyatira highlights the concern of being too tolerant.¹⁴

As Pastors of Christ's church, teaching and instruction on spiritual formation through Christian education toward Christ-centered relationships and marriage must become an integral pedagogy to be implemented and emulated. At Light of the Community Christian Church, it seems, at times, as Pastors, we sit back and watch not only our congregants but also our children turning from their Christian values toward worldly pleasures. Rev. Pamela considers the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) and how the

¹⁴ Revelation 2:20, New Revised Standard Version. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture will be taken from the NRSV.

son had all of his needs met. Yet there was something pulling him from the safety of his home and family. Christian education plays an important role in the life of a person. When individuals step out into the world, away from the safety net of familiarity, hopefully, sooner than later, God will beckon, gently reminding them, to return to their place of stability. The memory of becoming too tolerant echoes in the mind of Rev. Pamela so as to remember to continue to be the leader and Pastor God called her to be. There is a song that is very dear and sung quite often at Light of the Community Christian Church: "I am on the Battlefield for my Lord." The battle of good versus evil is always present and the choices made will reflect how the story will end. The Church should be the light for wayward persons, and upon their return being welcomed with open arms and love.

The seed for spiritual formation was planted in her about the age five. She enjoyed inspirational music. Singing was an art that the family embraced which kept them close to one another. Her family was Christian, God fearing, and talented. As she grew through elementary and high schools being a part of the choir was always a joy. The gift of singing and the closeness of family kept this young lady on a spiritual path, for a great while. Christian education also played a significant role in her life; through attending Sunday school, Bible study, and youth groups that met every week. Sunday school was a major portion of the Christian education foundation God had planned for her life. She enjoyed reading and learning Scripture along with the teaching and discussion of it. Rev. Pamela was proud that her parents were Christian educators in church and her mother and sisters were educators in the secular world.

Christian education taught the importance of a relationship with God through Christ, but left out the education necessary for spiritual formation on Christ-centered relationships and marriages. Camp Christian became one form of Christian education that was attended every year from seventh grade until senior year. During camp, teens were educated on some Christian values and how to integrate those principles into their every day secular lives, but for the most part, the camps were superficial. Being around other young Christians going through similar growing pains was positive the group, but did not delve deep enough on worldly issues that would have helped them become better equipped for overcoming obstacles. Perhaps the leaders were inclined to think the youth would marry each other and everything would work out all right. But it was highly unlikely that most church friends would marry; it happens, but not often. So it was left up to the parents to impart Christian values along the lines of relationships and marriage.

In the beginning God created humans to be free of the struggle, God created humans to live in a garden paradise, to be a righteous seed, and to establish a holy family. But deception came into the garden when the snake appeared. All life as it was meant to be was disrupted by a bad decision. The mercy and redeeming grace of God can save anyone from a misguided decision. Once the snake appeared in her life, Eve fell for a line which caused their spiritual demise. Adam and Eve were instructed on what to do and what not to do, but their curiosity peaked and they had to see what was on the other side of perfection. For Rev. Pamela, the snake represents the connotation of a worldly man seducing a Christian woman. Her life began to unravel after graduation from high school when an unexpected pregnancy occurred and she married someone unlike herself. Becoming pregnant without being married was not what she envisioned would occur as

she recalled dreaming of who she would marry and how many children they would have. The lack of in depth Christian education and spiritual focus on godly values pertaining to relationships and marriage, resulted in the wrong choices. Christian women and men fall in love with ungodly individuals because they are not often taught what to do when confronted with having or not having sex or making the right choice on whom to date and whom not to date.

The person that Rev. Pamela first married deceived her, he acted as if he believed in God, but after getting married she realized that he was not a Christian. He became abusive and she lost all self-esteem, self-confidence and reassurance in her spiritual walk. The marriage brought about four children who were not allowed to be baptized; he was adamant about it. Today, of the four children, two eventually became baptized, the other two did not. As unpleasant as the marriage was, God allowed it to be used as a stepping stone toward helping others in similar situations. Abuse should not be tolerated, but it is so subtle, the victim, sometimes begins to think that it is something he or she has done to provoke such actions. Rev. Pamela remembered her mother saying that marriage is not easy, but it is what you make it. What the devil meant for evil, God meant it for good. This project may encourage families to return to being Christ-centered and a covenantal love toward marriage.

The situation that occurred in the first marriage was similar to what so many people are going through today, except for one part; marriage. Some today do not look at or view marriage as warranted. Her tenacity about teaching and educating individuals on relationships and Christian values and the importance of having God first in one's life, relationships, and marriage is paramount. She believes in helping others that are

struggling with relationships; her desire is to impart the wisdom God provided as a result of her marriage. God has always been influential in her life and struggles and God's grace never left, although it took time for her to realize it. God wants Christians to witness about their experiences and work out their faith by helping others in need. Satan is instrumental in trying to destroy people's lives, especially Christians. God is about construction, rejuvenation, formation, and transformation. God is all about lineage, the righteous seed and the multiplying of the holy family on the earth. Rev. Pamela believes in reaching out to others experiencing pain and suffering in their relationships and marriages in order to keep them from the same hurt and alienation she felt during her experiences. Throughout the heartache, although she was not active in church or including prayer in her daily walk, God was with her every step of the way. As she again began to pray, her supplication through the trials bought on the edification of God resulting in the manifestation of a different marriage, a Christian one.

After her first marriage dissolved, she immediately began attending church and met a Christian man who had a love for God through Jesus Christ. He too had been in a non-Christian marriage, and they were ready to put the past behind them and begin anew, this time focusing on God with Christ at the center of their relationship. Although they both experienced a great deal of hurt in previous relationships, most importantly, Jesus was at the center. God was spiritually forming her husband as he began taking classes at an Ohio university to earn a Bachelor's degree. They had one mode of transportation, limited funds, and six children to care for. Her husband attended school at night so he could continue working. She would pick up the children from the daycare center, and then her husband after work.

As a family, all of them went to the college and wait on her husband three nights a week. Rev. Pamela and her children would sit in the hallway at the school while he completed his classes. One evening, the Assistant Director of the university stopped by and spoke to Co-Pastor. The director mentioned noticing her and the children sitting in the hallway for over two weeks and wondered if there was something she could do for them. Rev. Pamela told her they were waiting on her husband to finish his classes. The assistant director said, instead of sitting in this hallway, honey, you need to be in classes with your husband. Looking at her in astonishment, Pamela explained she was not smart enough to go college. The assistant director took her to the office and the conversation continued there. This was another God moment in the spiritual formation of her life. Her self-esteem was low, she never thought about pursuing her own educational journey beyond a high school diploma. God was showing her someone and cared. After their conversation, she enrolled in Central State University and attained both her bachelor and master degrees. When God moved in her life, it was always in subtle, yet magnificent ways. She graduated Cum Laude and began feeling good about herself. Her self confidence returned and she was motivated to utilize her education toward a new career. She began working for a Historically Black College or University as the Employment Manager and remained for five and one-half years. She left the position and God provided opportunity for her to apply her experiences at Light of the Community Christian Church. Eventually she was accepted into United Theological Seminary's Doctorate of Ministry program.

After graduating with a Bachelor's degree, Willie attended a John Maxwell seminar on spiritual gifts. Everyone that God spoke to at the seminar, including Willie,

decided to become a minister. His wife was stunned. Willie is going to be a preacher? God has a sense of humor. Willie enrolled at Payne Theological Seminary to earn a Master of Divinity degree. They did not have the funds to pay for school, so he prayed to God and stated if you want me to go to school, God would have to pay for it. He received a notice from the Seminary saying they awarded him the Daniel A. Payne Presidential Scholarship that would pay for his schooling and a stipend for other expenses. Willie graduated from Payne, Rev. Pamela stood beside her husband aiding and assisting him as they ministered at four different churches. A Christ-centered relationship leading to a Christ-centered marriage is a win-win situation.

At Light of the Community Christian Church, we have a majority of single people, some have a partner, and have broken families. They find themselves not committed or married with a partner who does not attend church. There are some couples that belong to the church and as parents live separately from each other; they may have a child or children together, but are not the traditional family in the congregants' cases. They are not willing to marry each other. This type of broken relationship and non-commitment is typical and relevant to a great deal of couples in today's society. When relationships end up in a rut, it is up to the couple to grab a shovel and begin digging to find out the problem, address it, fix it, and move on down the road. Apparently, God and Jesus Christ are not a part of their relationships. The Pastors have counseled with some of them on occasion, but the congregants never divulge too deeply. This project was molded out of the hurt and the hope is that God will use this model to aid other churches whose congregants are in similar circumstances.

As God continued to spiritually form the Pastors, God's persistence in working on Light of the Community Christian Church with the Pastor was underway. After establishing a relationship with a local church network called Covenant Partners International, the bishop and his wife were in conversation with the Pastor about Light of the Community Christian Church and where God was leading them. Pastor informed them he was having difficulty keeping an assistant Pastor. The bishop's wife informed Pamela that God already appointed that duty to her. She laughed and stated that God could not use her in that capacity, but it had already been ordained by God. Rev. Pamela was licensed by Rev. Willie Barnes-Jackson at Light of the Community Christian Church and ordained by the Bishop and Co-Pastor Maddox under Covenant Partners International on April 29, 2011. All things are possible with Christ and everything God touches, flourishes and grows as God wills. What God did for the Pastors at Light of the Community Christian Church, God can do for others. There were complications, but Jesus fixed them. There were hills and valleys, but the presence of the Holy Spirit was influential on the outcome.

Some churches have become complacent when it comes to relationships and sin. In expressing to congregants the need to be in a relationship with Christ, sometimes means stepping on a few toes, yet it is better to step on some toes than to watch them sit on the fence and be lukewarm like the congregation of Laodicea (Revelation 3:16). God promised to vomit them out of his mouth because they would not take a stand. As Pastors, we must stand up for the truth and righteousness and we must live a life worthy of our calling. A part of her theology of ministry is that when God calls, God will enable you to move forth in Him. Pastors are called to equip the church for ministry in the

world. Pastors are called to give godly love to all persons. Pastors are called to serve not to be served. Pastors must take care of God's ministry and his family.

The Bible informs its readers to hear the prophetic Word of God. The voice of God cannot be heard unless one wants to hear it. God is spiritually forming Rev. Pamela and her congregants by empowering them through the spiritual disciplines toward Christ-centered relationships and marriage. One of her favorite Scriptures is found in Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. Again, if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone? And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken." God established marriage in the garden between Adam and Eve and blessed them. Two working together can seemingly withstand the storm better than being alone. Being in a Christian marriage can bring about solid families that teach their children how to pray in times of difficulty; how to pick up the Bible and find Scriptures that will assist when trouble is in the midst; how to meditate on God and contemplate all the ways God has intervened; how to reflect through journaling in order to write down their daily choices and decisions made and how much of an impact derived from these options.

She has been in a Christian marriage for over twenty-nine years. It has had its valley and mountaintop experiences, but through it all, God through Jesus Christ is and will always be at the center of her relationship. Just as her love permeates for God, it flows over into her congregation. Rev. Pamela believes in reaching back and helping others who are having trouble and seemingly cannot make the wise choices needed in

order for transformation to take place. She looks for innovative ways to enhance and promote continuous spiritual growth, but God through Jesus Christ makes the necessary changes in their lives. There is an age old Nigerian proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child.”¹⁵ This proverb is ancient, and for her, very true. As a community, everyone must look out for their brother or sister. Ecclesiastes states a threefold cord is not easily broken, by coming together in unity and love the church could potentially help rebuild strong families for God through Jesus toward a Christ-centered marriage. Light of the Community Christian Church stands on the promises of God and proclaims it is what you do for that Christ that will last. To God be the glory!

¹⁵ Wisdom Quotes, African Proverb Quote, accessed March 5, 2015
<http://www.wisdomquotes.com/quote/african-proverb.html>.

CHAPTER TWO

THE STATE OF THE ART IN MINISTRY PROJECT

Prophetic Proclamation

Before entering the discussion of the various theories around the subject of relationships and marriage which inform this project, it is necessary to share that the project itself represents a prophetic proclamation toward restoring and repairing relationships for the purpose of rebuilding the institution of marriage. According to the Book of Genesis, God's intention after creating humanity was for them to, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth," (1:26-28, NKJV). Additional emphasis on relationships and marriage is derived from the biblical statements "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (2:24), and "He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD," (Prov. 18:22).

The Children of Israel who were returning from exile in Babylon, along with the remnant of them that had remained and survived in Judah, had a calling on them to rebuild the Temple of God. Ezra 9:9 exemplifies their need to restore the people of God, repair and rebuild the house of God and its protective wall, "For we were slaves. Yet our God did not forsake us in our bondage; but He extended mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to revive us, to repair the house of our God, to rebuild its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem". In the next chapter of the Bible and in the

continuation of his effort to revive the people for the service of God, Ezra attempts to purify the ranks of the Israelites in order to bring them back into the good graces of God. Ezra's actions may seem a contradiction to the intentions of this project but they really are not. The call to revive, repair, and rebuild Gods temple also means doing what it takes to get the people ready for what God has planned for them. His intentions dictated clarity of thoughts and actions pertaining to the Will of God for the Israelites. Their success in their new worship environment meant being and doing what God required of them as God's chosen people. There was a necessity for them to purify themselves in mind, body, and actions although relinquishing themselves of their foreign wives might have seemed somewhat harsh:

Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, 'You have transgressed and have taken pagan wives, adding to the guilt of Israel. 'Now therefore, make confession to the LORD God of your fathers, and do His will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the pagan wives.' Then all the assembly answered and said with a loud voice, 'Yes! As you have said, so we must do. 'But there are many people; it is the season for heavy rain, and we are not able to stand outside. Nor is this the work of one or two days, for there are many of us who have transgressed in this matter. 'Please, let the leaders of our entire assembly stand; and let all those in our cities who have taken pagan wives come at appointed times, together with the elders and judges of their cities, until the fierce wrath of our God is turned away from us in this matter'(10: 10-14, NKJV).

The prophetic call on the life of Ezra and the Israelites to rebuild the temple was also a call to restore the people and to prepare them for worship, and that is what Ezra did. In like manner, the efforts of this researcher are a prophetic calling to proclaim that God would have His people revived and repaired in the area of relationships leading to the institution of marriage being rebuilt, as God had intended for it to be in the beginning.

One good example of what has been taking place around the subject of relationships and marriages in today's society is taken from his writings on "*The Outwardness of Religion*" and expressed by Howard Thurman in an analogy he uses to describe the experiences of a child, developing an understanding of its abilities and how the religious experience becomes important to it:

One of the great prophetic moments in the life of the child is when it is able to hold its own bottle, a definite manifestation of self-containment. Then in the crawling stages and in many ways prior to this stage, certain aspects of the immediate environment begin to develop their own character. The difference between softness and hardness, movable and immovable objects, and so forth, becomes apparent. Finally, as a result of unbearable pressure on the organism or in the organism, the body tries to stand—instinctively the child reaches out for support to anything at hand. . . . Another day comes and he struggles upright alone. . . . Something is born deep within him and shouts as only he can hear, 'I did it. I did it.' Then without warning the floor rises up to meet him. . . . the struggle to achieve selfhood is rugged, tempestuous, and ruthless.

In the religious experience the individual is faced with the necessity of surrender which grows out of his response to God. Such a response is in terms of surrender. This surrender is accomplished in one of two ways. It may be a self-conscious yielding of that which the ego itself is but the shell, the façade, the protection, really. . . . In the Christian religion, for many, this is the point of at which Jesus Christ comes into thrilling significance.¹

Individual adults are apparently going through these same motions to eventually come to the place of their faith. However, as did the child in the above scenario, they began the process with their own prophetic moment of self-awareness, sufficiency, and self-containment. As adults, many are still in this stage and have yet to develop the relationship with God and Christ to move beyond the point of their struggle to survive,

¹ Howard Thurman, *The Creative Encounter: An Interpretation of Religion and the Social Witness* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1954), 66-68.

and come to the place of surrendering their lives to God's will for them. Many have yet to find the need to have a life with Christ as the central thread which guides them in their relationships moving them toward marriage as God intended. Having an understanding of your abilities to be self-containing is good, but knowing that you can surrender to God through Christ, and have a much better experience is great. Knowing that Christ strengthens your relationships and marriages and brings you into the will of God is greatest.

There are some theories relating to being Christ-centered, marriage, and becoming spiritually formed that relate to the researcher's passion and gifts. God established the first union in the Garden of Eden between Adam and Eve. Marriage is important to God; therefore it should be just as important to human beings, the unity between two persons is a critical issue. When preaching and teaching on being Christ-centeredness and marriage, some of the congregants were not interested. The researcher received a prophetic vision that some of the congregants at Light of the Community Christian Church were lacking spiritual formation and Christian Education by utilizing the spiritual disciplines could be the necessary step in order for God to move them into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. It is the intention of this researcher to impart the spiritual disciplines of Prayer, Bible Study, Meditation and Reflection through journaling in hope to blend God through Jesus Christ more emphatically into their daily lives for a deeper, richer relationship. Once this much needed relationship is realized, then movement into a Christ-centered relationship toward marriage with a like-minded individual can manifest.

The researcher agrees with Cornel West when he states the following in regard to the human will for change, “The dignity of persons is their ability to contradict what is, to change and be changed, and to act in the light of that which is not-yet. The depravity of some people is their proclivity to cling to the moment, to refuse to transform and to be transformed. The Christian gospel accents decision, commitment, engagement, and action which transform what is in the light of that which is to be.”² The proclamation from God for this project is through the congregants’ proclivity, the act of continuing to do the same thing repeatedly, such as living in single family homes, unwed mothers, children being raised without their birth parent. Dwight N. Hopkins agrees with West when stating the following, “Black theology exists because God’s purpose is the liberation and full humanity of the poor. The work of black theology, therefore, is continually to bring together God’s liberation activities with the justice practices found in the black church and community.”³ For this project, liberation from worldly values and more attention drawn to the spiritual realm through the spiritual disciplines could be the turning point for the congregants at Light of the Community Christian Church. It is the goal of this project to train and instruct on why marriage matters and the spiritual disciplines in order to possibly re-direct or move them closer to engaging a Christ-centered relationship repositioning them toward marriage.

² Cornel West, *Prophecy Deliverance: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 17.

³ Dwight N. Hopkins, *Shoes That Fit Our Feet: Sources For A Constructive Black Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 207.

Spiritual Formation of Relationships and Marriage

For this study, theories dealing with spiritual formation, Christian education and Christ-centered relationships and marriage will be addressed. There are some congregants that do not want to cross over into the realm of living a more Christian lifestyle. Hopkins adds revelation to individuals that are caught up in worldly desires in the following way, “. . . [M]icrowave desires for instantaneous pleasures become an addiction, leading to insatiability in all aspects of life.”⁴ In order for churches to gain momentum in equipping individuals to be in relationship with God through Jesus Christ, the pedagogy of the materials taught will have to be re-developed and redefined in dealing with spiritual formation.

We are becoming a more individualistic society and it is the prophetic proclamation of this project to possibly help individuals return to the will of God through Christ-centered relationships toward a Christ-centered marriage. Cornell West says it better as he states:

⁴ Dwight Hopkins, *Being Human: Race, Culture and Religion* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 6.

The fundamental shift from a we-consciousness to an I-consciousness reflected not only a growing sense of Black collective defeat but also a Black embrace of the seductive myth of individualism in American culture. Black people once put a premium on serving the community, lifting others, and finding joy in empowering others. Today, most black people have succumbed to individualistic projects in pursuit of wealth, health, and status. Black people once had a strong prophetic tradition of lifting every voice. Today, most Black people engage in the petty practice of chasing dollars. American society is ruled by big money, and American culture is a way of life obsessed with money. This is true for capitalistic societies and cultures around the world.⁵

Dr. Michael Burer is an Assistant Professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary. Dr. Burer gave his definition of spiritual formation as “the intentional transformation of the inner person to the character of Christ. It is intentional in two ways: It is part of God’s will for the individual believer, and the individual believer makes a conscious choice about it; it is transformation in that it involves definitive, measurable growth in a certain direction; it involves the inner person in that it concerns itself with character, thoughts, intentions, and attitudes more than actions, habits, or behaviors; it has the character of Christ as its goal and standard of measure.”⁶ This is the working definition of this project.

Spiritual formation involves the spiritual disciplines and for this project the following disciplines will be utilized: Prayer, Bible Study, Christian Meditation, and Reflection through journaling. Marjorie Thompson in *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* portrays how living a Christian life by utilizing the spiritual

⁵ Cornel West and Christa Buschendorf, *Black Prophetic Fire* (BOSTON, MA: Beacon Press, 2014), 1.

⁶ Michael Burer, “Towards a Biblical Definition of Spiritual Formation: Romans 12: 1-2”, bible.org, accessed February 27, 2014, <https://bible.org/seriespage/towards-biblical-definition-spiritual-formation-romans-121-2>.

disciplines could aid in gauging attitudinal movement toward a Christ-centered marriage. Thompson states, “My purpose is to help people of faith understand and begin to practice some of the basic disciplines of the Christian spiritual life. Disciplines are simply practices that train us in faithfulness. . . . Such practices have consistently been experienced as vehicles of God’s presence, guidance, and call in the lives of faithful seekers.”⁷ Within the confines of this project Spiritual Formation is a key element in the congregants’ development toward Christ-centered relationships and marriages. Spiritual formation should occur once the participants intentionally invite Christ into their lives.

Authors Stephen Arterburn and David Stoop in their book, *Seven Keys to Spiritual Renewal: Biblical Insights For Your Journey Of Faith* provide insight regarding these Keys. The seven keys are: (a) Surrender, (b) Acceptance, (c) Confession, (d) Ownership, (e) Forgiveness, (f) Transformation, and (g) Preservation. For this project three of the keys will be utilized, surrender, ownership, and transformation. The authors communicate regarding Surrender in the following respect:

⁷ Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), xix.

Soul hunger is the same whether we live in the White House or in a shelter for homeless; whether we are the latest sex symbol or a devoted wife and mother; whether we are Bill Gates or a common working man. Whoever we are, wherever life has taken us, however much we have or don't have, we hunger for more—something richer, deeper, prettier, tastier, faster, or more satisfying. Some people acknowledge their hunger and seek to satisfy it in socially acceptable ways: education, career, family, friends, or public service. Others, not realizing that the emptiness they feel is common to everyone, become angry and attempt to satisfy their hunger in socially unacceptable ways: illicit sex, the misuse of drugs and alcohol, or violence. Whichever category of behavior we fall into, our need is the same: God. And the only way to God is to surrender to him.⁸

Thompson, Arterburn and Stoop agree that God plays a major role in the spiritual life of an individual. However, Thompson speaks of spiritual disciplines as vehicles of God's presence and guidance; whereas, Arterburn and Stoop reference God as a need pertaining to soul hunger and one needing to surrender to move closer to God. They are similar in regards to God being the beginning of the spiritual formation process that each individual enters into as they search for transformation. They are similar in regards to spiritual formation and spiritual renewal because each has the first step of the willing participant to desire a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. This surrendering to God is the initial action in seeking spiritual growth and a relational bond with God. Arterburn and Stoop say it best, "When we obey God outwardly but allow our minds and hearts to remain unsundered, it's only a matter of time until inward disobedience becomes outward sin."⁹

⁸ Stephen Arterburn and David Stoop, *Seven Keys to Spiritual Renewal: Biblical Insights for Your Journey of Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1998), 5-6.

⁹ Arterburn and Stoop, *Seven Keys*, 9.

The second key addressed is ownership. When it comes to taking responsibility for our own actions through the act of ownership, emotions play a big role in our dealings. Arterburn and Stoop suggest, “[Emotions] are the desires that propel us forward and the forces that hold us back. We cannot live in conflict with ourselves indefinitely, so eventually we change either our behavior or our beliefs.”¹⁰ The authors also insist:

Before we can throw off our old evil nature and former way of life we first have to identify what they are. Once we recognize our flaws and admit our weaknesses, we can take responsibility for ourselves by avoiding situations in which we are likely to sin. None of us has a choice as to which traits and tendencies we inherit, but we can choose what we do with them. Taking responsibility for the characteristics we inherit from our earthly parents means placing them all under the power and authority of our heavenly parent—God—and allowing him to redeem them for his use.¹¹

By taking ownership of your life, new doors and new possibilities could take one in new directions. The throwing off old ideologies and ungodly traits that might have taken one down the wrong path might allow the individual to begin anew with God. Jesus Christ provides redeeming grace and allowance for the one real relationship needed with God. Jesus paid the price for every individual, but taking ownership could allow the opportunity of taking our life and trusting it to God in bringing transformation through spiritual formation.

Jason E. Vickers wrote *Wesley: A Guide for the Perplexed*, included was a particular quote from John Wesley regarding spiritualism, he stated, “We must be holy in

¹⁰ Arterburn and Stoop, *Seven Keys*, 73.

¹¹ Arterburn and Stoop, *Seven Keys*, 73.

heart and life before we can be conscious that we are so. But we must love God before we can be holy at all, this being the root of all holiness. Now we cannot love God till we know he loves us. . . . And we cannot know his love to us till his Spirit witnesses it to our spirit.” Vickers responds to Wesley and imparts, “In other words, he appealed to spiritual intuitionism, according to which individuals could be conscious of the presence and work of the Holy Spirit assuring them that they were children of God.”¹² Vickers reiterated Wesley’s thoughts on the active role of the Holy Spirit in spiritual formation and their awareness of God’s presence in that formation.

Arterburn and Stoop communicated transformation as,

When God changes us, it then flows *through* us to others. . . The key is to look at each situation with eyes of faith and to ask God for help in transforming our circumstances, rather than pleading with him to remove us from them. This gives him the freedom he needs to do the necessary work and to make the necessary change in our hearts, not just in our circumstances. None of us can redeem our own lives. . . God is the Redeemer. . . . And he is ready, willing, and able to do the necessary work of redemption. The only thing he requires is our willing cooperation.¹³

Spiritual formation is the transformational change that should occur within the individual. Once this conversion takes place, at the point of choosing a partner should be through prayer and reliance on God to ensure the relationship be built upon God’s laws in order for a Christ-centered relationship or marriage.

Along similar lines of God working in the lives of individuals, but also in married couples, John C. Hagee wrote about the prophetic blessing in his book, and stated, “The world has certainly forgotten the sacredness of the holy matrimony of a man and a

¹² Jason E. Vickers, *Wesley: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2009), 98-99.

¹³ Arterburn and Stoop, *Seven Keys*, 133-136.

woman as well as the blessing of bearing children within that covenant relationship.”¹⁴

One of the safeguards of the church could be to promote the sanctity of marriage, to preach the Scriptures and live the Scriptures through remaining faithful within the confines of your marriage and not defiling the blessedness of the union.

Author Walter Scott wrote the quotation, “Oh what a tangled web we weave, when first we practise to deceive!”¹⁵ This quote while old, applied long ago as well as today. When reviewing this reference, the first word that pops out is oh. The ‘oh’ seems to signify a sorrowful sigh, indicative of being distressed. As the quote is dismembered, the tangled web we weave is significant in that Scott uses the word ‘we’. We is suggestive of the whole human race and as humans we tangle ourselves in such messes that the web resembles our relationships and connections that are all muddled and in utter confusion. Being deceived by an ungodly person is what she was experienced. In retrospect, the mode of deception as it pertained to her was the same as Eve was deceived in the Garden of Eden. God had spiritually formed while yet in the womb, she did not yet recognize her formation. Christians must be very careful whom they choose to associate and to build a relationship with. However, in order to make the appropriate choice, the right mindset is essential. Upon accepting God as the first relationship in one’s journey, the tangled web of deception could potentially play a major role in their life.

¹⁴ John C. Hagee, *The Power of the Prophetic Blessing: An Astonishing Revelation for a New Generation* (Brentwood, TN: Worthy Publishing, 2012), 5-6.

¹⁵ Walter Scott, *Brainy Quote.com*, accessed March 1, 2014, <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/w/walterscot118003.html>.

Tony Robbins stated, “I’ve come to believe that all my past failure and frustration were actually laying the foundation for the understandings that have created the new level of living I now enjoy.” He also gave the definition of insanity as, “If you do what you’ve always done, you’ll get what you’ve always gotten.”¹⁶ Albert Einstein stated the same thing differently, by saying “Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”¹⁷ Both explanations offer significance toward any necessary changes that people in bad relationships or marriages might want to consider. A relationship with God through Jesus Christ could potentially undergird their union with godliness and positive change, becoming a foundation which they could rebuild upon. The congregants of Light of the Community Christian Church seemingly make choices that have been destructive and disparaging, as a result of their spiritual formation. God is spiritually forming although they do not know or acknowledge it, nevertheless God does not give up on us. Decisions can make or break a person, God gave humankind the right to choose their direction. The choice is up to each individual which path they choose. She chose to move closer to God through a Christ-centered relationship toward marriage. Our decisions help to mold us and make us, ultimately God does the forming.

Joseph W. Walker, III, in *Love and Intimacy: Five Ways to get Together and Stay Together*, wrote, “To be ready for a meaningful relationship you have to know who you are. . . The key to knowing who we are is understanding who we are to God. That way we can be confident in our own skin. When you know who you are in God, you will know

¹⁶ Tony Robbins, *Brainy Quote.com*, accessed March 1, 2014, http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/t/tony_robbins.html.

¹⁷ Albert Einstein, *Brainy Quote.com*, accessed March 1, 2014, <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/a/alberteins133991.html>.

the truth and the truth will set you free for full disclosure.”¹⁸ Again, God lays the groundwork for individuals to identify with who they are in order to move forward in relationships with others. John M. Gottman wrote a book based upon seven principles to help marriage become successful, “The more emotionally intelligent a couple—the better able they are to understand, honor and respect each other and their marriage. Just as parents can teach their children emotional intelligence, this is also a skill that a couple can be taught.”¹⁹ To have God grounded in your relationship and emotionally the couple fit to handle issues and predicaments that are bound to happen, by combining both authors’ ideology, it could be the pivotal balance needed in order to keep the couple together moving toward a Christ-centered marriage.

Michael Catt wrote *Fireproof Your Life: Building A Faith That Survives The Flames*, in this model Catt espoused:

The ‘wicked,’ or ungodly, are those who live their lives without any thought of God. They have no point of reference in regard to the Lord. Just as 7Up® was called the ‘un-cola,’ with no cola in their product, the ungodly lack anything of God in their lives. But every day believers ‘ooh’ and ‘ahh’ over stars and celebrities whose lives are not worth imitating. A wicked person is not just a mobster or a murderer or an abortionist. A wicked person is anyone who does not have time for God in his life or her life. Wicked people rule out God in their agenda and order of business. This should sound a warning bell to believers. If we rule out God by being unfaithful to the Scriptures, by not spending time with God in His Word and in prayer, wouldn’t that also be considered ‘wicked’ in the eyes of God? One reason our lives end up in shambles is we’ve bought into the lies of the world.²⁰

¹⁸ Joseph W. Walker, III, *Love and Intimacy: Five Ways to get Together and Stay Together* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 27.

¹⁹ John M. Gottman, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (New York, NY: Three Rivers Press, 1999), 3-4.

²⁰ Michael Catt, *Fireproof Your Life* (Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 2008), 30-31.

Based on Catt's statement, wickedness involves an individual making an intentional decision to do bad or evil, and those individuals usually do not want or need any part of God. Individual decisions stand in the way of God spiritually forming every human being to be in relationship with God through Jesus Christ. By allowing deceivers (ungodly or wicked individuals) into one's existence, the person's disobedience to God's will turns them toward the world and away from God. Arterburn and Stoop also agreed with Catt in ungodly living through the following statement, "Surprisingly, those who consider themselves active in religion tend not to live by the ethical standards of what they believe—they tend to be unaware of their faith's basic teachings; and while they profess a belief in God they do not necessarily belong to a community of faith where they attend religious services."²¹ Unchristian people may deceive the believer and take them off their path, because the believer's faith is not grounded. Rev. Pamela learned the lesson of being misled and was emotionally scarred from having previously married someone with that type of wicked behavior.

Fireproof was a marriage improvement model by Catt, the Pastor of Sherwood Baptist Church who taught a four step process which encompassed couples and taught them how to build a faith that was fireproof. The four keys were: "(a) A fireproof faith has confidence in God, (b) A fireproof faith does not ignore or deny problems, (c) A fireproof faith is expressed through confidence in the Word of God, and (d) A fireproof faith must become a way of life."²² Another model that revolved around couples was created by Stephen and Alex Kendrick, *The Love Dare*, that model was a "40 day

²¹ Arterburn and Stoop, *Seven Keys*, ix.

²² Catt, *Fireproof*, 50-51.

challenge for husbands and wives to understand and practice unconditional love. This model involves a journey that must be taken. A journey involving learning the keys to finding true intimacy and developing a dynamic marriage.”²³ For married couples within the church, the Christian-based Love Dare marriage improvement model encourages the readers to take a forty day challenge emphasizing assorted relational tasks. Completing those tasks while engaging the Scriptures could create a stronger love bond which could be amazing and relationship forming. Both Catt’s and Kendricks’s models are slightly outside the scope of this project, because they only deal with married couples. The intent of the Christ-centered relationship and marriage model is to spiritually form congregants through Christian education in order to move them toward Christ-centered marriage.

Another challenge just as important in relating to individuals or partners, is the Howard Thurman 40 Day Journey. This journey involves the spiritual disciplines, as will be used in this project, are Scripture, Bible study, meditation and reflection through journaling. The challenge takes twenty to forty days to complete and working with a partner is an option. Thurman engages this journey by stating, “One of the highest services a person of faith can perform is prayer for family and friends, for one’s community of faith, for the victims of injustice, and for one’s enemies.”²⁴ Prayer should be essential in the life of an individual, it is sustainable, it is strengthening, it is powerful. Prayer will be one of the spiritual disciplines utilized for this project.

Gary Kinnaman, in *Learning to Love the One You Marry: Advice to Young Couples About Commitment, Sex, Money, Intimacy and Much More*, intimates:

²³ Stephen Kendrick, and Alex Kendrick, *The Love Dare* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2008), vii.

²⁴ Howard Thurman and Donna Schaper, ed., *40-Day Journey with Howard Thurman* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Books, 2009), 13.

We don't really have a moral crisis in America. At least that's not the heart of the problem. Our real problem is a crisis of godlessness. Now by 'godless' I don't mean the worst imaginable wickedness, although godlessness and wickedness certainly go hand in hand. I do mean 'godless' though, in the sense that God is a non-factor in our public institutions and in so many of our homes. Even Christian families can be godless. You can say you believe in Jesus, and you can go to church faithfully, all the while living your life like everybody else around you. As if there really were no God. . . 'Godless' is family, work, and leisure without God. Without acknowledging God's laws. Without an anchor.²⁵

Through the vehicle of Christian education and rising above the godless behavior by initiating the spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible study, Christian meditation and reflection through journaling, and Christian love, the congregants may come to desire a Christ-centered relationship toward marriage. Kinnaman's Marriage Improvement model emphasized love and provides advice for both singles and couples. He also gave two recommendations, "initiate a group of close friends and meet and talk with each other about issues going on in the relationship and find a Christian counselor when the situation becomes too tough for the support group to handle."²⁶ A godless lifestyle will potentially act as an anchor in holding families down. Satan is out to destroy families which God loves and to dissolve the relational bonds human beings have with God.

Kinnaman's recommendations are similar because if Christians hang out together, keep company with one another and share their issues or problems among each other, it could provide positive, constructive recommendations for the troubled couple. Gottman gives his opinion on positivity as, "The foundation of a lasting marriage rests on two kinds of bedrock: agreeing with your spouse on which style for handling disagreements

²⁵ Gary Kinnaman, *Learning to Love the One You Marry* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1997), 171-173.

²⁶ Kinnaman, *Learning to Love*, 211-212.

you both can live with, and a large dose of positivity.”²⁷ Positivity is a clear-cut quality that could make the difference of being able to hold on to the relationship or break it off. The mental stability of the couple is important and it is also imperative that they support each other and stand strong together. Her father use to introduce their family members prior to them singing on stage by saying, a family that sings together, stays together. This is an example of what a positive statement can do not just for the couple but for the family as well. Whether Christian families are singing together, or Christian friends gather for bonding time with one another, God should always be in the midst.

Kenneth Hagin, Jr., in his *Built to Last: How to Build Strong and Lasting Relationships With God, Family and Friends*, said the following regarding his Christ-centered relationship model, “Many people today are looking for good, quality relationships, yet many people today are having problems in relationships. The reason they are having problems in relationships and having problems understanding relationships is that they have never established a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. It is difficult to establish healthy relationships with other people if you haven’t first established a relationship with the Creator. Remember, He created within mankind the desire to have a relationship with Him first and foremost.”²⁸ Hagin’s model regarding relationships was very similar to this project’s model in the sense that there had to be a relationship with God through Jesus Christ first, before stepping into a relationship with another person. God created human beings as relational in the likeness of God. Hagin

²⁷ John M. Gottman, *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail...And How You Can Make Yours Last* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 202.

²⁸ Kenneth Hagin, Jr, *Built to Last: How to Build Strong and Lasting Relationships With God, Family, and Friends* (Broken Arrow, OK: Faith Library Publications, 2002), 4.

also disclosed his thoughts on family, “I believe if marriage relationships are strong, the family will be strong, the Church will be strong.”²⁹ The Christ-centered relationship model for Hagin not only strengthened the marriage relationship, but the family and the church as well.

J. Thomas Johnson, a retired Pastor in Dayton, Ohio on many occasions stated, “We have three families: one in which we are born into; one we are married into; and one we are baptized into.”³⁰ Every one of those families is important to God and should be just as important to the individual. God is looking for each family to be created whether through pregnancy, marriage, or becoming a member of a church. Once a Christ-centered relationship is established, the individual could become grounded in God’s word thereby realizing the need to be in a covenantal relationship with God.

L. Gregory Jones wrote an article entitled *Shaping Character*, affirming, “It seems less obvious that we would want to live with someone who would challenge us to give up the vices we love and to affirm the gifts we are afraid to claim. But this is where our real growth in character will occur. This kind of challenge is also crucial to nourishing a healthy marriage. To be sure, such growth involves commitment, takes time and requires trust. It involves a commitment that we will give of our own lives sufficiently to allow that relationship to shape our character.”³¹ His book examines how to shape character in marriage, it explored the level of commitment it takes in order to secure the reassurance of God and the protection God provided during the tough times.

²⁹ Hagin, *Build to Last*, 71.

³⁰ J. Thomas Johnson, Sermon, Summit Christian Church, Dayton, OH Pastor.

³¹ L. G. Jones, *Christian Century* 115, no. 36 D, 1998, p 23-30, EBSCOhost.com, accessed March 3, 2014, <http://web.b.EBSCOhost.com/ehost/detail?vid=11&sid=b526a6d1-8a00-4539-85dd-b78522912e48%40sessionmgr198&hid=127&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=rft&AN=ATLA0001007592>.

Jones' theory regarding character building allows each individual to see what gifts they bring into the relationship. God might pair an individual who has an overabundance of strong will to one that has issues with being an introvert. God might do this for the purpose of strengthening both; or one may learn humility and the other empowerment. God is able and willing to bring individuals and couples into Christ-centered relationships toward marriage. It should be understood though the relationship be Christ-centered, tests and trials still come. Reliance on the strength of God instead of self-strength can allow for the redeeming grace of God to flow into every circumstance that comes into one's life. The Bible teaches in Proverbs 3:5 to "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight."

The spiritual formation of each person through Christian education, spiritual disciplines and godly values, should help empower them and potentially move them toward Christ-centered marriage. Gloria Dillon, stated in a telephone conversation one day "There is no limit if God is in it!"³² God is on the individual's side, there is no glass ceiling that could stop one from attaining what God has for them. This also applied to relationships and marriages, especially those struggling in them.

Marva Dawn, in *The Unnecessary Pastor*, enlightened and shared; "Today part of the role of Pastors (seemingly unnecessary to the world) is to equip congregation members to resist the ethos of a society that is presently hostile to genuine marriage, true

³² Gloria Dillon, Pastor of Glory Ministries, Xenia, OH 45385. Graduate of United Theological Seminary and Project Professional Associate. Telephone conversation, March 22, 2014.

love, and mutual submission. . . . [T]o walk circumspectly, to discern the times and redeem our time, to discover the will of God, and to be filled continually with the Spirit.”³³ Pastors’ Christian pedagogy should spiritually form and empower the congregants with godly (biblical) values. Pastors have a duty and responsibility to their congregations to ensure that proper Christian education is taking place in order to empower them to walk in God’s grace and mercy. The spiritual formation that could occur throughout the education process may help to enhance their relationships while moving them toward godly marriages that are Christ-centered.

Father Peter Daly in the article “The Church Has Lost Control of Marriage”, published in the *National Catholic Reporter*, commented; “Our county courthouse is across the street from our parish church. Weddings are performed on both sides of the street. We both use the ‘vocabulary’ of marriage, but the words don’t have precisely the same meaning. Let’s face it -- the church has lost control of the cultural conversation on marriage. Just about any parish priest can tell you that. Even devout Catholics often ignore the church’s teaching and views on marriage.”³⁴ Today, it seemingly has become the norm to have babies out of wedlock, ungodly relationships, couples living together with no thought of marriage, divorce rates are staggering, no prior counseling before marriage. God must be in the center of the congregants’ life, spiritual formation through Christian education is key in spreading the pedagogy that God wants every Christian to live with a Christ-centered focus, a covenantal love and mutuality. Daly states:

³³ Marva Dawn and Eugene Peterson, *The Unnecessary Pastor: Rediscovering the Call* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 181-182.

³⁴ Peter Daly, “The Church Has Lost Control of Marriage”, *National Catholic Reporter*, May 20, 2013, accessed February 19, 2014, <http://ncronline.org/print/blogs/parish-diary/church-has-lost-control-marriage>.

The church was the dominant voice on marriage for a long time. For about 1,000 years, it defined marriage in Western Europe. From the time of Gregory the Great (pope from 590 to 604) until the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, the law of the Catholic Church was basically the law of Western Europe on marriage and family life. . . . But if you wanted to get married, you had to come to church. If you wanted an annulment (no divorce) you had to ask the church. . . . The church combined Germanic Tribal law and Roman civil law into the ecclesiastical law of marriage, still reflected in our modern canon law. From the Romans, we got the idea that marriages had to be ratified by a ceremony (*ratum*). From the Germans, we got the idea that marriages had to be consummated by sex (*consumatum*).³⁵

Light of the Community Christian Church stands firm in God's Word. If a marriage was to take place back in the sixteenth century, the church had to be contacted. There was power in the church the bishop had to approve all marriages. Today, persons do not need the church or Pastors to get married, it take place without permission of the church. Today, the number count for divorce continues to mount. Scriptural values, in many incidents, are not pursued, however, they must be taught, practiced, or lived. In order to get back to God's natural scheme of covenantal love, empowering congregants through Christian education for their personal life and that of their partners and children.

Robert L. Stivers, Christine E. Gudorf, Alice Frazer Evans and Robert A. Evans wrote, *Christian Ethics: A Case Method Approach*, character formation was conveyed in this way, "In doing ethics faith is the heart, reason the head, and Christian character the mature union of the two in love. Insofar as faith is a gift of grace, character cannot be

³⁵ Daly, *The Church Has Lost Control of Marriage*, 1.

taught. Insofar as character is a product of reason, it can be both taught and developed. Faith can change perceptions, habits, and intentions; good teaching and practice can develop them.”³⁶ This pedagogy falls in line with Christian education and spiritual formation. Faith, reason and Christian character are combined in the God-given talents graciously provided to all humanity. Pastors must see that the congregants are empowered with Scriptural values taken from the word of God, the Bible.

Cain Hope Felder in *Troubling Biblical Waters: Race, Class and Family*, informs the readers that, “The essence of Paul’s ‘ministry of reconciliation recruits persons from broken households and brings them into the Household of God. Thus, while Paul envisions God’s reconciling activity as opening new possibilities for Jews and Gentiles as the people of God, the ministry of reconciliation (Greek word ‘*katallagē*’).”³⁷ Tenney defines reconciliation as:

Reconciliation is a change of relationship between God and man based on the changed status of man through the redemptive work of Christ. Reconciliation is always pre-eminently God working in man to change the basis of relationship. God is never said to be reconciled to man, but man to God since it is man’s sinfulness which creates the enmity (Col. 1:21; Rom. 8:7). From his position of being reconciled, as accomplished as fact, man is to turn to God to respond to the new relationship in faith and obedience.³⁸

The ministry of reconciliation is one of the building blocks needed at Light Of The Community Christian Church. God wants humanity to be reconciled unto and under the auspices of God. Through the spiritual formation of the congregants, it is with great

³⁶ Robert L. Stivers, Christine E. Gudorf, Alice Frazer Evans, and Robert A. Evans., *Christian Ethics: A Case Method Approach* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 9.

³⁷ Felder, Cain H., *Troubling Biblical Waters: Race, Class and Family* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 162.

³⁸ Tenney, Zondervan Pictorial Dictionary. Greek word *katallagē*. The greek *katallasso* denotes an “exchange” which when applied to persons, suggests an exchange from enmity to fellowship. 707-708.

anticipation that as the Christian education is being rendered, there is hope that a revelation of conversion, transformation and reconciliation unto God through Jesus Christ that takes place within the participants.

Willie J. Barnes-Jackson, Pastor of Light of the Community Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), in the epigraph of his dissertation explained spiritual formation in this way, “A result of promoting individual Christian maturity to develop the church community is, church growth occurs, when there is formation of the church’s spiritual properties.”³⁹ Spiritual formation is a necessity in order to empower congregants toward Christ-centered relationship and marriage. This maturation can only happen through a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. The doors of the church are open, ready to accept weary travelers on their spiritual journey, arms spread wide to embrace them and their families through the love of God.

Christian Education Toward Spiritual Maturity

Chris Denhart wrote an article in *Forbes Magazine* entitled “How the \$1.2 Trillion College Debt Crisis Is Crippling Students, Parent, and the Economy.”⁴⁰ The article gave credence from Lauren Asher in the editorial that some people are seeking higher education because of the stressed economy, hoping for a better job. Everyone is affected by the economy, job market and the cost of living which could take its toll on the family. By providing training classes on Christian education it could have the potential to

³⁹ Barnes-Jackson, Willie J., *The Impact of Empowering Congregants With Spiritual Formation and Christian Education*, D.Min. thesis, United Theological Seminary, 2013. ix.

⁴⁰ Chris Denhart, “How the \$1.2 Trillion College Debt Crisis Is Crippling Students, Parents and the Economy”, August 7, 2013, *Forbes.com*, accessed March 28, 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/specialfeatures/2013/08/07/how-the-college-debt-is-crippling-students-parents-and-the-economy/>.

assist families in building a stronger relationship with God through Jesus Christ which might encourage them to move toward a Christ-centered marriage. When Christian membership seemingly begins to look no different than those who are unchurched, it would appear the church has a problem. Pastors and lay leaders should become very concerned. It looks as if people are losing their souls, relationships and marriages to the idea or notion of premarital sex, shacking up, becoming unwed mothers and fathers. The church can no longer stand idly by watching congregants display this type of behavior and lifestyle, it is time to turn some tables over, as Jesus did in the temple when the people began to dishonor God's house. The Bible commands individuals to be doers of the word, not only hearers (Rom 2:13), action is required. Therefore Light of the Community Christian Church is seeking to implement the Christ-centered marriage model for the congregation.

Gary C. Newton wrote, *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity*, could be evidenced when an individual begins to take on characteristics of becoming more like Jesus. Newton explains, "Christians who want to grow spiritually will impact the world only to the degree that they live what they say they believe. Holiness is not an option for the growing Christian. It is a prerequisite for service in the kingdom of God. A pure heart is required for servants of a holy God."⁴¹ In order to move toward a Christ-centered relationship toward marriage is and begins with God through Jesus Christ, thereby making the bond between the couple stronger with the love of God and becoming more humble.

⁴¹ Gary C. Newton, *Moving Toward Spiritual Maturity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 61.

Martin Luther King, Jr. in his book *Strength to Love* proclaimed, “Called to be the moral guardian of the community, the church at times has preserved that which is immoral and unethical. Called to combat social evils, it has remained silent behind stained-glass windows. . . . If the church of Jesus Christ is to regain once more its power, message, and authentic ring, it must conform only to the demands of the gospel.”⁴² As Pastors and lay leaders, we can no longer sit nonchalantly by and act as if we are not losing the battle to ungodliness and sinful living. Pastors are the mediators between congregants and Jesus Christ. Christian education should be imparted to congregants in order for more spiritual formation to occur in the area of Christ-centered relationships toward marriage.

There are many strategies and models toward building Christ-centered relationships and marriages such as: Christian education; Christ-centered relationship and marriage counseling; Christ-Centered Therapy; and Open Marriage model. The Catholic Church promotes a Christ-centered relationship model called Pre-Cana. It is a Pre-marital counseling component for couples, which could be an important element prior to the couple taking their wedding vows. Pre-Cana is a retreat for couples and is built around the New Testament Scripture John 2: 1-12 where Jesus’ first sign or miracle was presented, which is being utilized for the project. The classes encompass the following:

⁴² Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1963), 25-26.

Pre-Cana classes are designed for engaged couples. Through short talks, sharing of the facilitator's own experiences of their marriages and faith growth, group exercises and personal reflection, engaged couples are guided through topics useful for a successful marriage. Some of the topics presented are: The Sacrament of Matrimony, Natural Family Planning, grown in faith, the changing nature of marriage, couple adjustment, mutual decision-making, the elements of effective communication, conflict management, intimacy and sexual-expression, financial planning, goal setting, the extended family, Theology of the Body, stewardship, the Church and where to find help and counseling for marriage.⁴³

This pre-marriage model aligns closely with the project's theme in that it educates the couple prior to the marriage and incorporates God into the relationship, which is essential. By undergirding the couple with God's wisdom and love of family, the couple could begin with a covenantal love and mutual pledge of commitment. When relationships hit a hurdle or a stumbling block, it is not necessarily the end of the road. Proverbs explained that all things can be worked out to God's glory, if Christ is at the center of our relationship, and that with Christ all things are possible (Mat 19:26). Christian education is a method which could be utilized in order to re-establish holy families and a righteous seed. Pre marriage counseling is a great tool with the potential of saving come couples heartache in the future. If Christian counseling would have been available for her first marriage, it could have had a different outcome or result.

Neil T. Anderson, Terry E. Zuehlke and Julianne S. Zuehlke wrote *Christ Centered Therapy: The Practical Integration of Theology and Psychology*. They work with the practice of psychology and theology, which enhances the art of listening, they state, "We work patiently with one or both parties because of our commitment to the

⁴³ Marie Baptiste, "What Are Pre-Cana Classes?" last modified September 10, 2014, accessed March 28, 2014, http://www.ehow.com/info_8172224_pre-cana-classes.html.

biblical value that marriage is a reflection of the relationship between Christ and the Church, whom he will never leave or forsake (Ephesians 5:22-33).”⁴⁴ The Christ-centered counseling model integrates theology and psychology which could permit the couple to absorb the spiritual disciplines into their union making it stronger and resilient. The Pastors of Light of the Community Christian Church are not licensed counselors, therefore that model was practical but out of the realm of expertise for the project.

Joseph W. Walker III in his book *Date With Destiny*, communicated to couples that “God has placed greatness inside of who you are as a couple. . . . One of the most important lessons that every believer needs to know is that you are not defined by what has happened in your past. You are defined by how you react.”⁴⁵ Christians should remember and acknowledge that everything that happens in their life is not about self. When the threshold of marriage is crossed the focus should be on ‘we’ and not ‘I’ and both parties play a significant role in each of their lives. Life happens and circumstances arise literally out of nowhere, but when they do happen, by being equipped with Scriptural values as a result of being Christ-centered, there could be a Christian solution applied instead of a secular one, by using the Word of God.

In Chapter Seven “Companions on the Journey: The Gift of the Spiritual Director,” in Marjorie J. Thompson’s *Soul Feast*, there is referenced the responsibilities of a Spiritual Director. First she defined spiritual direction, simply put, “[E]ssentially the relationship of a teacher and learner in the area of practicing the spiritual life. Jesus, like

⁴⁴ Neil T. Anderson, Terry E. Zuehlke, and Julianne S. Zuehlke., *Christ Centered Therapy: The Practical Integration of Theology and Psychology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing Company, 2000), 21.

⁴⁵ Walker, Joseph W. III, *Date With Destiny: Find the Love You Need* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2011), 1.

prophets and rabbis before him, gathered disciples and taught them daily, both publicly and privately.”⁴⁶ Comparable to a Pastor or lay leader, Thompson goes on to establish the definition of a Spiritual Director:

Spiritual direction is basically the guidance one Christian offers another to help that person ‘grow up in every way . . . into Christ’ (Eph.4:15). A spiritual guide is someone who can help us see and name our own experience of God. Each of us needs to grow out of the second hand faith to acknowledge of the way the Spirit works in our own lives. At times, spiritual guides will teach, admonish, or confront us firmly in love to hold us accountable for our attitudes and our behaviors. But more often spiritual directors act as companions, encouraging and supporting us, praying for us, listening to us, and sharing the learnings of their own life journeys.⁴⁷

Thompson’s statement can be closely related to this project in that Christ’s life should be followed and emulated. In Christian education, Pastors take on both aspects of being a teacher and a learner. Foremost, congregants should want to have a relationship with Christ in order to walk spiritually and live a Christ-centered life. In this spiritual formation model, Thompson addresses the responsibilities spiritual directors have, “(a) A spiritual guide listens to us; (b) A spiritual guide helps us to notice things; (c) A spiritual guide helps us to respond to God with greater freedom; (d) A spiritual guide points us to practical disciplines of spiritual growth; and (e) A spiritual guide will love us and pray for us.”⁴⁸ The spiritual director appears to respond to clients, just as Pastors and ministers respond to their congregants.

⁴⁶ Marjorie Thompson, *Soul Feast*, 108.

⁴⁷ Thompson. *Soul Feast*, 110.

⁴⁸ Thompson, *Soul Feast*, 110-111.

Belton L. Platt's model regarding marriage improvement which focuses on the husband, exposes how even ministers have been spiritually formed in order to be better husbands. Platt wrote *Ministry of the Husband*, in his book he informs the reader of the following:

I am fully persuaded that if we as married men will fulfill our ministry in our homes to our wives as God has ordained it to be, every other area of our lives in which God has ordained us to walk will fall into place. I also believe with all of my heart that the degree to which you fulfill your ministry to your wife will be the degree of blessing and fulfillment in your own life that will be measured back to you from God. Men who fail their wives ultimately fail God. We must, as married men, learn our responsibilities as husbands and faithfully fulfill these responsibilities to the glory of God.⁴⁹

His model is an excellent one for a Christian male group. As Pastors, whether husbands or wives, Christian education is needed. Pastors can fall into the same trap as their congregants in that issues popping up within their marriage must be addressed. If there is no continued education and spiritual formation, the marriage could become troubled to the point of divorce.

Christian education plays a most important role in the spiritual formation of congregants. Richard A. Ramsey wrote an article for the *Christian Education Journal* entitled "The ministry of ... grading", he imparted that, "The very nature of Christian education should imply that the educational benefits have spiritual impact, just as the spiritual benefits will also have educational impact."⁵⁰ John MacArthur, Jr., in *Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry: Shaping Contemporary Ministry With Biblical*

⁴⁹ Belton L. Platt, *Ministry of the Husband: A Heart-To-Heart Talk With Men Who Desire To Be The Husbands God Has Called Them To Be* (Camarillo, CA: Xulon Press, 2009), xii-xiii.

⁵⁰ Richard A. Ramsey, "The ministry of ... grading", *Christian Education Journal* 9, no. 2 (Fall, 2012): p 408-419.

Mandates, concurred with Ramsey on the role of the church when stating, “[t]he decline of preaching is a major factor contributing to the church’s weakness and worldliness. If the church is to regain its spiritual health, preaching must return to its proper biblical foundation.”⁵¹ Paul states to the church in Laodicea in Revelation 3:16 that the church has become too tolerant, lukewarm, and has dismissed ungodliness as if it does not matter.

MacArthur also relates, “The church might not get any closer to current secular characteristics, but it always seems to move further away from God’s absolutes.”⁵² As Pastors, there must be a push to get back to the basics, to return to the word and educate the congregants on godly (biblical) values toward Christ-centered relationships and marriage. Horace Mann, regarding education and the national welfare in the *Twelfth Annual Report to the Massachusetts State Board of Education* affirmed, “Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men, — the balance-wheel of the social machinery.”⁵³ Education equals the playing field for all human beings, no matter their color, race or creed. Another component to education is the spiritual one, which is Christian education, in which a child can begin Sunday school from the age of three and continue for the rest of their life. Education in the Christian realm never ends, it just transitions from one glory to the next and it brings with it spiritual maturity. As for Christ-centered relationships toward marriage, there should be a

⁵¹ John MacArthur, Jr., *Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry: Shaping Contemporary Ministry With Biblical Mandates* (Dallas, TX, Word Publishing, 1995), 254.

⁵² MacArthur, *Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry*, 155.

⁵³ Horace B. Mann, Mary Mann, editor, *Life and Works of Horace Mann, Volume III* (Boston, MA: Horace B. Fuller Company, 1868), 669.

Christ-centered relationship model that deals with singles as well as couples. Christ-centered marriage models affirm that without God, most marriages may not last.

Christ-Centered Relationships Toward Marriage

Paul's letter to the Romans conveyed, "What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us?" (Rom 8:31) This Scripture emphasizes the protection one receives by being in a relationship with God. That God will be your shield and will shelter one from their problems. Paul again teaches in Philippians that all things can be worked out through Christ Jesus (Phl 4:13). Couples thinking of marriage should also consider the protection God gives and how they might accomplish all things dealing with marriage through their relationship with Christ. If the couple is Christ-centered, there could be more stability and solidity in their relationship which strengthens their bond with each other. Joy B. Reeves, in *Broadening the Sex Role Perspective of Clergy*, suggests, "A Christian family is a family that lives together in Jesus Christ."⁵⁴ A Christian family has Christ at the center of it. Neil T. Anderson and Charles Mylander, in *The Christ Centered Marriage: Discovering and Enjoying Your Freedom in Christ Together*, state "Without Christ we are not simply handicapped. Without Christ we are not simply limited in what we can do. Without Christ we can do nothing! We are incomplete without Him, and so are our marriages. To maintain a Christian marriage we have to become one in Christ. Just saying that won't change anything. It has to be

⁵⁴ Reeves, Joy B., "Broadening the Sex Role Perspective of Clergy", *Journal of Pastoral Care*, 32 no. 1 March 1978, p 35-41, accessed February 25, 2014, <http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=11&sid=b526a6d1-8a00-4539-85dd-b78522912e48%40sessionmgr198&hid=127&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZW9vc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=rh&AN=ATLA0000765001>.

individually appropriated through repentance and faith.”⁵⁵ She acknowledges and concurs with Reeves, Anderson and Mylander that you are totally incomplete without Christ, therefore your relationship and marriage is incomplete.

Another model which has grown rapidly has been online dating services. Those websites serve as mediator/liaison between two people looking for relationships. One particular website which promotes dating services entitled *Top Ten Christian Dating Sites of 2014*. This site allows one to filter through Christian dating services in order to possibly find someone who is compatible to the viewer. “The top ten sites are: (a) ChristianMingle.com, (b) Match.com, (c) Zoosk.com, (d) eharmony.com, (e) ChristianPeopleMeet.com, (f) CatholicMatch.com, (g) SeniorPeopleMeet.com, (h) Chemistry.com, (i) SingleParentMeet.com, and (j) ChristianMatchmaker.com. Christianmingle.com is the fastest growing of the ten sites. Their niche is Christian singles seeking others with similar values. Zoosk.com is the third fastest growing secular dating site. Their reviews state fun and easygoing – online dating your way.”⁵⁶ This relationship model could be useful for those who are willing to put their personal information online in finding a mate. There are some couples within the church that have been matched online and their relationship resulted in marriage. “The eharmony.com website was founded by a Christian psychologist and has over twenty million registered users. The site informed viewers that eharmony.com is not a dating service, it is a ‘relationship site for singles looking to find long-term, committed relationships’. Their

⁵⁵ Neil T. Anderson and Charles Mylander, *The Christ Centered Marriage: Discovering and Enjoying Your Freedom In Christ Together* (Ventura, CA: Regal, A Division of Gospel Light, 1994), 16-17.

⁵⁶ *Top Ten Christian Dating Sites of 2014*, accessed March 3, 2014, <http://www.toptenchristiandating.com/?kw=christian%20online%20dating%website&c=21853401187&t=sea>. . "This website is updated regularly by the content owners, and may not currently reflect the exact information in this document. It was accurate at that time it was accessed."

site has a diverse group of individuals from all fifty states and more than two-hundred countries.”⁵⁷ This model with its method of bringing Christians together, sounds really good, but there is no mention of God or Christ being in the relationship, just the word Christian. Models of this nature may work, but there must be a level of caution applied when using the internet as a dating source leading to marriage. There are different dating sites who single out particular groups of individuals such as, single, divorced, Christian, senior citizens, gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender, and ethnic diversity. It might appear people dealing with the difficulty of being shy, timid, nervous, or who are fearful, they could perhaps use those sites when they struggle with meeting in person.

Nena O’Neil and George O’Neil in their book entitled; *Open Marriage: A New Life Style For Couples*, suggested the following regarding Open Marriage:

All of us have profound needs for a wide range of interpersonal relationships and for a greater variety of companionship than the closed marriage permits. Marriage, by combining the resources of two individuals, *ought* to increase our opportunities for discovering the pleasurable companionship of new people, but in fact it does just the opposite. The closed marriage contract demands that all friends must be acceptable to both partners. This, of course, is a perfectly logical extension of the clause that all social functions must be attended jointly – the only trouble being that the insistence upon joint attendance is restrictive and unrealistic in the first place.⁵⁸

This Marriage model does not advocate Christ-centeredness and does not align with biblical values. Open relationships seems to be the norm today. In these relationships there seemingly is no commitment, no concrete relationship, and no boundaries. This lifestyle apparently works for some, but in order to get back to the alignment of God’s

⁵⁷ *Eharmony.com.*, accessed February 27, 2014, <http://eharmony.com>.

⁵⁸ Nena O’Neil and George O’Neil, *Open Marriage: A New Life Style For Couples* (New York, NY: M. Evans, 1972), 170.

will to exemplify holy families, one's lifestyle should lead to Christ-centeredness, which could potentially be accomplished through Christian education on godly biblical values.

Anderson and Mylander define Christian marriage in the following way "A Christian marriage is a spiritual union with God that is intended to be a visible expression of the relationship that God has with the Church, which is the Bride of Christ."⁵⁹ Bryan and Kathy Chapell, in *Each For The Other: Marriage as it's Meant to be*, share:

In Christian marriage each individual's actions have an *other* focus, manipulation, intimidation, and deceit for personal gain have no place here. Such actions will destroy true love even if they secure personal advantages for a time. The Bible simply puts before us the wonderful mystery of human happiness: in the giving of self life's greatest gains. The greatest loves grows where self is served the least. This mystery takes concrete form in marriage when we patiently endure one another's fears and foolishness, refuse to use strengths to take advantage of another's weaknesses, enable each to fulfill responsibilities, cheer one another's dreams, comfort each other's sorrows, work to understand each other's needs, and forgive one another.⁶⁰

The Chapell's are a married couple that have weathered storms together and because Christ was at the center of their union, their marriage flourished. There are sacrifices that each make for the other. Anderson and Mylander propose, "Because we are in Christ, we have the Spirit of God within us. . . . We have to live our lives in total dependence upon God. All temptation is an attempt by the evil one to get us to live our lives independently from God. Remember, apart from Christ we can do nothing (see John 15:5). In addition,

⁵⁹ Anderson and Mylander, *The Christ Centered Marriage*, 14.

⁶⁰ Bryan Chapell and Kathy Chapell, *Each For The Other: Marriage As It's Meant To Be* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 192-193.

because we are in Christ we have the assurance He will meet all our needs (see Phil. 4:19).⁶¹

Gary Chapman wrote *The Five Love Languages: The Secret to Love That Lasts* entails five love languages or words which were created for husbands and wives. Chapman generated a profile in order to understand one another's love language. The languages are, "Words of Affirmation, Quality Time, Receiving Gifts, Acts of Service or Physical Touch."⁶² The profile allowed the couples to partake in a survey and based on the answers given, the individual discovered their love language. The books could potentially help in the determination of your love language.

Andrew Purves in *The Crucifixion of Ministry* suggested, "Knowing Christ is like what happens in a long-term marriage. Husband and wife continue through the years to deepen their knowing of one another, their commitment to one another, their bond with one another. That is what Paul is striving for, reaching for, pressing on to attain, this kind of knowing, this kind of living bond, this kind of intimate communion with Christ."⁶³ Knowing Christ is the focus of the Christ-centered model that will be utilized for Light of the Community. As Purves suggested, Christ must be in the relationship for there to be an active, life-long commitment. Francis Chan, in *Crazy Love: Overwhelmed by a Relentless God*, wrote, "The Bible says that when we obey God's commands, we benefit. I think we naturally assume that if we look out for our own interests and concerns, we will be happy. But people who sacrifice for others will tell you that seasons of giving are

⁶¹ Anderson and Mylander, *The Christ Centered Marriage*, 67.

⁶² Gary Chapman, *The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love That Lasts* (Chicago, IL: Northfield Publishing, 2010), 191.

⁶³ Andrew Purves, *The Crucifixion of Ministry: Surrendering Our Ambitions to the Service of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2007), 102-103.

the most rewarding of their lives. It turns out that the Bible is right—‘it is better to give than to receive’ (Acts 20:35). People generally do find greater joy in giving freely to others than they do in rampant self-indulgence.”⁶⁴ The marriage model in this project deals with spiritually forming individuals and unmarried as well as married couples through Christian education toward Christ-centered marriage. Godly biblical values are utilized to empower them through Christian education in order to be spiritually formed.

Walker also stated, “All those things that keep you away from God interfere with God’s original plan for your life. When God is in the center of me, my own self-centeredness is gone.”⁶⁵ The Chapell’s provided further enlightenment, by stating “Lives devoted to serving self cannot avoid making one’s own desires the God of every action. . . . A marriage built on the foundation of persons finding happiness by using one another ignores the deepest passions God has placed in our hearts by his Spirit. We discover the happiness God intends for our lives only when we use the resources and privileges God has given us for the good of another. By exercising the sacrificial love Christ exhibited, we deepen our understanding of God’s care, discovering our value even as we affirm others.”⁶⁶

Walker again asserted, “When you are a blessed man, your children are gonna be blessed, your grandchildren are gonna be blessed, your dog’s gonna be blessed, your cat’s gonna be blessed, your fish is gonna be blessed, everything around you is gonna be

⁶⁴ Francis Chan, *Crazy Love: Overwhelmed By A Relentless God* (Colorado Springs, CO: David Cook, 1984), 109.

⁶⁵ Walker, *Date With Destiny*, 65-66.

⁶⁶ Chapell and Chapell, *Each for The Other*, 10-11.

blessed.”⁶⁷ Being blessed is what God wants for every individual. God wants to establish holy families and a righteous seed from as far back as the Garden of Eden. The Co-Pastor of Light of the Community Christian Church has come to realize that the potential of the congregants being educated on Christian Scripture and godly (biblical) values, could likely show movement from a lack of unholy relationships to that of a Christ-centered one toward marriage.

Douglas Anderson wrote an article titled, *Some Theological Reflections on the Purposes of Marriage*, he communicated, “In sacred moments within marriage, as within Holy Communion, I believe that we tap in to that powerful Presence of Love. In those moments the painful fragmentation and separation that we experience within ourselves as persons, and between ourselves as married partners, is overcome.”⁶⁸ Marriage purports a “we” attitude and not a “self” one. As partners on the same team, working together in love, and unity. Just as the act of communion is holy, the state of matrimony is holy and both institutions are governed and sanctified by God. She has encountered sacred moments in her current marriage, such as, reading the Bible with her spouse, teaching her grandchildren about God, family coming together on Sunday to dine together. Co-Pastor Jackson discovered that it was through a Christ-centered relationship that issues and problems that once were critical in her life, were now surmountable. Anderson and Mylander shared, “If you are ready to put Christ back into your marriage and home, there

⁶⁷ Walker, *Date With Destiny*, 88-89.

⁶⁸ Douglas Anderson, “Some Theological Reflections on the Purposes of Marriage”, *Word & World* 5, no. 4 (1985): 364-369, accessed March 3, 2014, <http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=11&sid=b526a6d1-8a00-4539-85dd-b78522912e48%40sessionmgr198&hid=127&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZW9vc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=rft&AN=ATLA0000951575>.

is great hope for you. The Lord has an answer because He is the answer. He is the Bondage Breaker, and will help set your marriage free.”⁶⁹

For this project, an assortment of theories and models will be discussed on Spiritual formation, Christian education and Christ-centered marriage. Spiritual formation on relationships is the grounding through the spiritual disciplines, Bible study, prayer, Christian meditation, reflection through journaling, and Christian love. Spiritual formation is an intentional act, the formation should occur once the individual makes it an objective in wanting to move closer to God. Christian education plays a crucial role in the life of the seeker. Just as secular education is a twelve year process for children from the age of three to eighteen, it does not necessarily have to end at the twelfth grade.

Some of the models were sacrificial love models where the couple sacrificed for one another. The Love Dare challenged couples to go on a forty day journey to challenge the partners in coming out of their comfort zones. Other models also addressed open marriage and online dating where individuals had the choice of not having to be obligated to one person. It is recognized that online dating services focus on the individual wanting to find a date online instead of in person. Whatever a person's choice for beginning a relationship, God is the answer to strengthening their lives and relationships. Each person should want to become more spiritually prepared through Christian education and spiritual disciplines to handle the stresses, pressures and hassles that happen in life.

God through Jesus Christ spiritually formed Rev. Jackson throughout her life with the connectivity to church, a Christian family and a Christ-centered relationship which lead to marriage. Christian education was utilized to empower and enhance her spiritual formation. This allowed her decision making process to become more Scriptural than

⁶⁹ Anderson and Mylander, *Christ Centered Marriage*, 19.

secular. The optimism and expectation is to measure attitudinal change in the congregants pertaining to Scriptural values for relationships and marriage in order to move them into a Christ-centered relationship toward marriage. This project could offer them a different point of view or altered mind-set than the one they currently have. It is with great anticipation that utilizing the spiritual disciplines will transform and spiritually form the participants in guiding them toward a Christ-centered relationship toward marriage.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The Problem

In January 2005, Light of the Community Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) was established in Dayton, Ohio as a new church start in an urban area. Some of the congregants are single or unwed parents who are either living with their mates or raising children born out of wedlock. Due to what is believed to be a lack of spiritual formation many of them are dealing with major complications in their relationships. Seemingly, there is a lack of structure and development toward becoming Christ-centered disciples. Such maturation in the faith and communication could open up the possibility of a Christ-centered marriage. Therefore congregant relationships are unstable and insecure, in need of healing, forgiveness and transformation which Christ brings.

The Solution

There are many theories written on the subject of Christ-centered relationships toward marriage. Examples include: a) secular and Pastoral counseling; b) love dares and challenges directed toward partners and couples; c) retreats; d) self-help books; e) how to communicate effectively; f) one theory is to just not address the issue of Christ-centered relationships toward marriage. For this Christ-centered relationship toward marriage

model, the answer is God, through Jesus Christ. God ordained marriage in the Garden of Eden.

There are some who disagree with the original criteria for marriage involving a man and a woman. As a proclamation from God, it should be never be altered. The Bible instructs in Joshua 24:15, “But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”¹ In the end, when it is all said and done, your actions here on this earth will have to be explained. Even in these tumultuous times, clinging to God through Jesus Christ seems to be the safest venture, anything less, will not stand. Utilizing the spiritual disciplines of prayer, meditation, reflection through journaling, and Bible study, could be a great tool when engaging a Christ-centered relationship. The first secure relationship should be with Jesus Christ. After this union has been maintained and preserved. Once the inner transformation blossoms into spiritual formation the journey begins toward a Christ-centered relationship toward marriage.

BIBLICAL

Old Testament

Lyn Brakeman in *The God Between Us: A Spirituality of Relationships*, conveyed; “Adam and Eve did not live happily ever after. But they did live together, for better or worse.”² Although Adam and Eve sinned against God, they stayed together to weather the storms, and they worked together as a team and continued to love God. It must be

¹ Joshua 24:13 (KJV).

² Lyn Brakeman, *The God Between Us: A Spirituality of Relationships* (Philadelphia, PA: Innisfree Press, 2001), 133.

taught in the churches that God is all about unification, the family unit, solidarity. In the beginning when God created the heavens and earth, God took time to create a helpmate for Adam by the name of Eve, God called Eve, Adam's wife.

Merrill C. Tenney in, *The Zondervan Pictorial Dictionary*, purports; "Both the way in which Eve was created, and the designation 'woman' serve to emphasize also the intimacy, sacredness and inseparability of the marital state, transcending even that relationship which exists between children and parents (Gen. 2:24)."³ In getting back to the basics that God originally planned for humans, pertaining to marriage, it is clear and apparent that spiritual formation is a necessity and the vehicle to develop godly (biblical) values in congregants for Christian marriage. Throughout this study, the expectation is to move toward the desire of being in a Christian marriage, with a Christian partner, and with Christ at the center as the foundation.

Thomas L. Brodie in, *Genesis As Dialogue*, conveyed the following regarding marriage and family; "Marriage ultimately is founded not on sociological conditions but on a quality in God."⁴ Fundamentally, marriage is God instituted and fashioned the way God intended.

The Old Testament problematic text used in this study is found in Genesis. Tenney provides detail about the book when he states the following; "[T]he first book of the Bible. The name derived from a Greek work meaning 'origin' or 'beginning' which is

³ C. Merrill Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963), 264.

⁴ Thomas L. Brodie, *Genesis As Dialogue* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 1990), 114.

the title given to the book in the Septuagint. The Hebrew name for the book of Genesis is ‘*berēshith*’.”⁵

This particular text was chosen because the events of the story were so closely related to the problem identified by this project in the church, and its moving towards Christ-Centered marriage. The text exemplifies the complications that arose from a lack of Christ-centeredness and godly (biblical) values leading toward marriage. Gen. 38: 11-19 reads as follows:

¹¹ Then Judah said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, ‘Remain a widow in your father’s house until my son Shelah grows up’—for he feared that he too would die, like his brothers. So Tamar went to live in her father’s house.¹² In course of time the wife of Judah, Shua’s daughter, died; when Judah’s time of mourning was over, he went up to Timnah to his sheepshearers, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite.¹³ When Tamar was told, ‘Your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep,’¹⁴ she put off her widow’s garments, put on a veil, wrapped herself up, and sat down at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. She saw that Shelah was grown up, yet she had not been given to him in marriage.¹⁵ When Judah saw her, he thought her to be a prostitute, for she had covered her face.¹⁶ He went over to her at the roadside, and said, ‘Come, let me come in to you,’ for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. She said, ‘What will you give me, that you may come in to me?’¹⁷ He answered, ‘I will send you a kid from the flock.’ And she said, ‘Only if you give me a pledge, until you send it.’¹⁸ He said, ‘What pledge shall I give you?’ She replied, ‘Your signet and your cord, and the staff that is in your hand.’ So he gave them to her, and went in to her, and she conceived by him.¹⁹ Then she got up and went away, and taking off her veil she put on the garments of her widowhood.

The story of Judah and Tamar is one that could show stark contrast to modern day relationships in this postmodern world. Judah and Tamar understood the benefits of marriage, property, and the need or desire for heirs. Walter Brueggemann explains, “The story may give us pause about the usual bourgeois dimensions of sin. What is taken most

⁵ Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Dictionary*, Hebrew name for the beginning: *berēshith*, 305.

seriously is not a violation of sexual convention, but damage to the community which includes a poor, diminished female.”⁶ Young women and men today at times find themselves in this very predicament. They find themselves at a crossroad, not knowing who or where to turn. If they come to the church, they may be shunned, made to feel guilt and shame as Rev. Pamela felt. It is even worse to be embarrassed by your community and peers. Although Brueggemann gives account of a female, this project undergirds both parties, male and female as being damaged, hurt and broken.

J. Gerald Janzen in *Abraham and All the Families of the Earth: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis 12-50*, tells about how community is affected by righteousness, “This story reminds us that ‘righteousness’ (*tsedaqah*) in the Bible has to do primarily with acts of faithful loyalty that give life to the community. However much the ethics of the post-Sinai community may rightly be embodied in covenantal laws, royal decrees, wise sayings, and priestly *torah*, such later embodiments of Israel’s ethics have their rootage in the ethics of family and clan loyalty.”⁷

The story begins with Judah leaving his family and venturing off to visit a friend named Hirah, an Adullamite,⁸ in the city of the Canaanites. Cana is about five miles northwest of Nazareth. John Wesley’s Old Testament notes on Judah state; “Judah went down from his brethren – Withdrew for a time from his father’s family and got intimately acquainted with one Hirah an Adullamite (Hebrew word ‘*ādūllāmîy*’ meaning an

⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1982), 311.

⁷ J. Gerald Janzen, *Abraham and All the Families of the Earth: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis 12-50* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993), 154.

⁸ *Strong’s Hebrew Lexicon*, Power Bible CD, vol. 39 (Bronson, MI: Phil Linder, Online Publishing, 1999-2003), Hebrew Lexicon #5726 for the word Adullamite: ‘*Adullamiy*. Defined as a native of Adullam.

inhabitant from Adullam).”⁹ This was Judah’s first mistake. He left his family, when Judah withdrew from his family, he married a Canaanite woman the daughter of Shua, which was forbidden and dishonored God, and calamity ran rampant in his family from that time on. Wesley continues when saying; “When young people that have been well educated begin to change their company, they will soon change their manners, and lose their good education.”¹⁰ Christian parenting is no easy task, when the mother and father take their time and energy to raise the child in the Christian path, it seems too easy for non-Christian men and women to draw the Christian person leading them down a road to destruction, just as in the case of Judah. Worldly relationships and marriages have a tendency to draw Christians into them and away from their origins of faith and family, resulting in a multitude of complications.

Judah’s first born son Er married Tamar, but Er dishonored God and was killed. This left Tamar without a husband and without a child or heir. Herbert Anderson, Don Browning, Ian Evison, and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen wrote *The Family Handbook*. They conveyed the following; “The male head of household ‘rules’ in his house, and his wife and children are his, almost extensions of himself. He has the right to control them,

⁹ John Wesley, *Notes on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, vol.1, *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament* (Bristol, UK: William Pine, in Wine-Street, 1765;repr., Salem, OH: Schmull Publishers, 1975), 149.

¹⁰ John Wesley, *Notes on the First Book of Moses*, 149.

and to determine their destiny. . . Genesis and Judges present a time when families reigned supreme, where father of the extended family had unrestricted rights of control over his children. . . Judah can contract marriage for his sons and order his daughter-in-law to be killed.”¹¹ Judah had power over his family and his extended family, and because of his power, he sent his second son Onan to Tamar in order to marry and give his first-born son a heir. Onan was not interested in having a child for his deceased brother and when he went in to Tamar, he released his seed on the ground. This act was displeasing to God and Onan was killed.

A couple of questions left to ponder are: a) why did Onan not want to heir his brother a child; b) why did God kill him and his brother Er? In Genesis, God did not kill Cain for slewing his brother Abel, but yet Er and Onan were killed due to their disobedience. Could it be that God intended for Cain to be an example of God’s forgiveness and grace? God marked Cain so that others could see he was protected in his banishment (Gen. 4:15). As for Er and Onan wickedness kept their lives from being spared. Since Jesus was a descendent of this family, it appears God may have intended for them to be Jesus’ forefathers and that their wickedness disrupted God’s plans.

One might infer that Tamar valued marriage in the Hebrew tradition although she was a Canaanite. She obviously cherished the need for an heir to the point of establishing a family through trickery and deception as a harlot. Her willingness to portray herself as such displays her esteem for family and inheritance. William W. Bassett wrote; *The Bond of Marriage: An Ecumenical and Interdisciplinary Study*, in this tome it was communicated that; “The bond of marriage is privileged in law because it is sacred for

¹¹ Herbert Anderson, Don S. Browning, Ian S. Evison, and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, *The Family Handbook* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 278.

life. It confines and protects the family as the primary community of love. The inherent durability of the marital union is necessary for the realization of the basic values of civilized society, and so it has been sustained in all nations by the rule of law.”¹² Judah was head of his household, so the law and custom of marriage was upheld. When Judah’s first born son died, Tamar was married to the next eldest son. After the death of Judah’s wife and his second son Onan, Tamar was to be given to the youngest son Shelah. Due to the age of his third son, Judah decided it would be best to wait for Shelah to grow up before being wedded to Tamar. Tamar lived in her father’s home awaiting the day of the promise of marriage to Shelah. One can only imagine what was going on in Tamar’s mind, because it was not her fault that her two husbands were killed. She did not have an heir, and would not have an inheritance.

Tenney defines inheritance as; “A fundamental principle of Hebrew society was that real, as distinguished from personal, property belonged to the family rather than to the individual. This came from the idea that the land was given by God to His children, the people of Israel, and must remain in the family.”¹³ His statement regarding inheritance helps to explain why having an heir was so important to Tamar. With no husband or heir Tamar had to be very unsettled and worried about her future.

After the death of his sons and wife, Judah traveled to Timnah to visit Hirah, the Adullamite. Someone informed Tamar that Judah was going to Timnah and she concocted a plan to deceive her father-in-law. She took off her widows garments and traveled to Timnah. Because Tamar no longer desired to sit and wait for Judah to marry

¹² William W. Bassett, *The Bond of Marriage: An Ecumenical and Interdisciplinary Study* (Notre Dame, IN: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), ix.

¹³ Tenney, *Zondervan Pictorial Dictionary*, 374.

her to Shelah she took matters into her own hands. It would appear that Judah's fear may have been the potential death of his last son in being married to Tamar.

An opportunity presented itself for Tamar to deceive Judah into producing a heir, so she took advantage of his journey to Timnah. Tamar sat in an open place at the edge of the city of Enaim because she did not want any other woman to catch his eye. When Judah laid his eyes upon Tamar, she must have looked very attractive to him. He was unable to identify her with a veil covering her face. Wesley's notes on the Old and New Testament state; "It was the custom of harlots in those times to cover their faces, that tho' they were not ashamed, yet they might seem to be so: the sin of uncleanness did not then go so bare-faced as it now doth."¹⁴ There is no time given of how long Judah's wife had been dead, but Judah wanted sex and he knew where he could get it. In the negotiations for payment of services to be rendered, Tamar knew that if she conceived it could come back upon her. She then asked for a pledge from Judah. This pledge included three significant offerings; Judah's signet, cord, and staff which were very personal belongings. Is it not peculiar that Judah should give these personal items to a prostitute? He also appeared to have honest intentions of returning with the promised payment.

Esther Marie Menn in her book, *Judah and Tamar*, communicates the following in respect to Tamar:

¹⁴ John Wesley's Notes on the Old and New Testament Commentary, *Power Bible*, CD 3.9. (Bronson, MI: Online Publishing, 2003).

Although Tamar initially appears in the second part of Genesis 38 as a compliant, potential female partner in reproduction (similar to Shua's daughter in the first verses of the chapter), she ultimately emerges as the narrative's unconventional protagonist when the male characters fail to initiate progress towards procreation through conventional means. Her heroic ventures to overcome the childless stasis of the narrative include choosing for herself a sexual partner different from the one designated for her, disguising herself and traveling on her own initiative to meet him, and deceiving him in order to elicit the male services earlier denied her. Her achievement of conception signals a resumption of the basic pattern of procreation established in the first verses, but it simultaneously places her life and the life of her unborn children in grave danger. She overcomes this self-inflicted jeopardy by producing the pledge shrewdly obtained from her unsuspecting father-in-law, thus forcing him to reverse his earlier judgment.¹⁵

Menn's persona of Tamar could be viewed as one of great courage and bravery in order to fulfill her dream and vision of being a mother. Did Tamar understand that by tricking Judah into impregnating her, that there could be repercussions? Tamar stood her ground and possibly felt consoled in the fact that she had the three forms of identification that would show proof of Judah's behavior.

E. A. Speiser in; *The Anchor Bible GENESIS*, wrote about Tamar in this way; "When Tamar became convinced that her father-in-law was temporizing, she tricked him into leaving her with child, by waylaying him the disguise of a harlot. But she had the presence of mind to secure positive proof of her mate's identity."¹⁶ Gerhard Von Rad wrote *GENESIS A Commentary* which included explanation regarding Tamar requesting Judah's personal items as; "The objective value of the two objects may have been small, and what could such a woman do with the signet of a strange man! But for Tamar the

¹⁵ Esther Marie Menn, *Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38) In Ancient Jewish Exegesis Studies in Literary Form and Hermeneutics* (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 1997), 28-29.

¹⁶ E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, Anchor Bible, vol.1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 300.

pledge was invaluable because it bound Judah quite personally to her. Here the reader must admire Tamar's keen presence of mind."¹⁷ God played a role throughout this entire story, just as God plays a role in our lives. We were given the gift of decision making, and God wants us to make good choices and to follow through on what decisions we make. Judah did not follow through on the marriage of his youngest son to Tamar.

However, she ensured she conceived a heir which surprisingly turned out to be twins and in the lineage of Jesus. Even more surprising, is the fact that two of Judah's sons died and yet through Tamar God were giving Judah's sons back to him. Amazing! Rev. Pamela believes that even when situations seem so drear and bleak, God shows up and corrects the wrong.

This story could have had a different ending had Judah kept his promise to Tamar by marrying her to his son Shelah. When Judah found out Tamar was pregnant, he had the nerve to want to kill her. Could you imagine Judah's face when he found out that he laid with his daughter-in-law? Wesley's Old and New Testament Notes explain; "Lest his sin should come to be known publicly, Or 2. Lest he should be laughed at as a fool for trusting a whore with his signet and his bracelets. He expresses no concern about the sin, only about the shame. There are many who are more solicitous to preserve their reputation with men, than to secure the favor of God, lest we be shamed goes farther with them than lest we be damned."¹⁸ After it was found that Judah would be father of Tamar's children, Judah told the group of people that were ready to stone her, that she

¹⁷ Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis, Old Testament Library* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1956), 355.

¹⁸ John Wesley's Notes, *Power Bible*.

had been more righteous than he, more forthright than he, because he had not given his son to marry her.

Brueggemann imparts; “Tamar has committed the kind of sin the ‘good people’ prefer to condemn—engaging in deception and illicit sex and bringing damage to a good family. For a moment, until aware of his own involvement, Judah reacts on the basis of that sort of ‘morality’ (v. 24). . . Judah has spurned the claims of his daughter-in-law. By his indifference, he has violated her right to well-being and dignity in the community (v. 11).”¹⁹ There are usually consequences when promises are broken and not kept.

Sometimes there are complications when choices are made to live according to the flesh and not God’s commandments. God’s chastisement can be tough and complications arise out of dishonoring God. On the subject of sexual relations, the Apostle Paul stated in the book of Corinthians “it is better to marry than burn (1 Cor. 7:9).

The story of Judah and Tamar was a poignant one. The promise of marriage continues to be a struggle for people today. The same things that were happening two thousand years ago continue happening today. Broken commitments, loss of integrity, children born out of wedlock, unwanted children, lust instead of love, fornication, and the humiliation of sleeping with different partners; are just a few of the problems or complications that effected Judah and Tamar and affect society today. These issues are inside the church and have been for years, this is not a new problem. Even in sinful relationships, women and men are misrepresenting themselves. They are glamourizing themselves on the internet and using deceptive measures in order to gain sexual encounters with one another. One such method is by using pictures that have been

¹⁹ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 311.

falsified or photo cropped and fabricating stories to make them look more attractive.

There was also the double standard of Judah deciding to kill Tamar for harlotry with their being no repercussions for Judah caught in the act of fornication. God is the author of people's journeys, and God sets the price for sinful people and acts, as with Er and Onan.

Sharon Pace Jeanson in *The Women of Genesis: From Sarah to Potiphar's*

Wife, wrote and explained Tamar regarding her role as being Judah's daughter-in-law as:

Powerless members of society who are wronged cannot always confront the perpetrators of injustice. The society in which they live may ignore the poor, exclude the aliens, or oppress minorities, and the rich or powerful may retaliate against any who complain or confront them. Because the women represented in the Book of Genesis are all less powerful than the men in their society, many of them must resort to nonconfrontational methods of dealing with the injustices they experience.²⁰

In the end, Tamar received her desired result, she had not only one heir, but two, and one of Tamar's twins (Perez) is in the lineage of Jesus. Women continue the struggle today with the battle of injustice still being fought. Times have changed, but not for the better, the children are the ones who really suffer, they have to deal and live with issues and problems in their homes. But there is hope, God through Jesus Christ is the answer, a Christ-centered relationship must be restored and families reconciled to God.

In the United Theological Seminary Doctoral Ministry January 2014 Intensive, Dr. Andrew Park gave some startling statistics that "One in forty babies are born in the United States out of wedlock."²¹ Kim Painter stated in a 2013 article for the Christian Century entitled, *Delayed Marriage Leading to Increased Number of Out-of-Wedlock*

²⁰ Sharon Pace Jeanson, *The Women of Genesis From Sarah to Potiphar's Wife* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 98.

²¹ Andrew S. Park, "The Holy Spirit" (lecture, Marriott Hotel, Dayton, January 28, 2014).

Births advised, “First comes baby, then comes marriage? That is the new norm for many middle-class young Americans—and they and their children are paying a price. . .”²²

There are too many babies being born without the permanence or constancy of having a family. This is one of the complications from an improper union. Christian women and men find themselves at times involved with a non-Christian partner. The emotions and physicality of the relationship run so high that the spiritual side of the person has no chance of surviving without help. There is a lack of family planning and Christian education; their presence within a Christ-centered relationship or marriage could help to avoid a conglomerate of non-Christian families continuing to mate and populate the world with children who are raised by sinful people.

Christians must be spiritually formed in order to make morally sound decisions and be ready to fight off the devil at every turn. How does the story of Judah and Tamar affect the congregants at Light of the Community Christian Church? For one God does not want his children to be wicked or sinful. God wants us to raise holy families and Judah married a woman that was outside of the faith which was not pleasing to God which was evidenced in their wicked sons and god’s wrath upon them. Some individuals get caught up in worldly desires and unnatural acts that turn them away from their Christian teachings. There are those few in the church that try to do what is right by God but get caught up in worldly desires and unnatural acts that turn them away from Christian (biblical) values. God wants each Christian to look inward to the spirit and not outward to the world while making informed decisions, especially when it pertains to the

²² Kim Painter, “Delayed Marriage Leading to Increased Number of Out-of-Wedlock Births”, *The Century Christian*, May 29, 2013, accessed February 10, 2014, <http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2013-03/delayed-marriage-leading-increased-number-out-wedlock-births>.

person involved in your personal life. God is a forgiving God, and there is hope in that Jesus Christ will save you from your sins, hope that God forgives when repentance is made. In 2 Chronicles, hope is alluded to in the following statement, “[I]f my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land (2 Chr 7:14).

Jeansonne also commented regarding prejudice and bias as;

Tamar’s experience of injustice is universal. It is impossible to live without seeing injustice in the world unless one chooses to ignore it. Once aware of injustice, one may demand rectification, but in many cases it persists. . . Tamar’s own initiative enabled her to have the child to which she was entitled, but the reader knows that an injustice remains—Judah does not provide support for her. As a woman under the authority of her father-in-law, Tamar was dependent on him for justice.²³

Seemingly, Tamar’s wanting a husband was refuted, but through it all, it took courage and bravery to overcome the complications encountered due to improper relationships and marriage. God was the definitive outcome for this story.

New Testament

Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green, and Marianne Meye Thompson’s book, *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology* suggests the Apostle Paul stated, “He sees nothing against marriage, to be married is certainly not to sin, and those who feel compelled to be married should do so with a clear conscience. . . It is clear from this discussion that Paul does not think sexual activity is inherently sinful, but he is strongly convinced that the only appropriate opportunity for acceptable sexual behavior is

²³ Jeansonne, *Women of Genesis*, 106.

within the bonds of marriage between husband and wife.”²⁴ For this project, it is clear from Paul, that marriage is acceptable and that sexual activity should be within the bonds of a husband and wife whereby the relationship is Christ-centered.

In Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green, and Marianne Meye Thompson’s book, *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology* they gave the following synopsis regarding the New Testament, “Undoubtedly, the NT remains the focus of studied attention and continues to inspire because of its recognition as Scripture in the Christian church. Together with the books of the OT, these documents are regarded by the various Christian communions around the world as the decisive witness to Jesus Christ and hence as normative for shaping Christian belief and practice.”²⁵ There are many accounts of Jesus and his signs and miracles but the story of the wedding holds a great deal of spirituality and holiness within it due to the sacredness of marriage.

Raymond Brown in *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to John* communicated regarding the Johannine Sign as, “a favorable designation for a miracle.”²⁶ Yet Achtemeier, et.al. interpret John’s use of the Johannine sign as, “John is the only Evangelist to use the term ‘signs’ (sēmeia) rather than wonders (terata), mighty deeds (dynamis), marvels (thaumasia), or strange things (paradoxa), terms found in the Synoptic Gospels, for Jesus’ miracles. Jesus’ miraculous deeds are ‘signs’ in that they point to a reality beyond themselves. . . . But when understood as manifestations of Jesus’

²⁴Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green and Marianne Meye Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 341-342.

²⁵ Achtemeier, Green and Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament*, 1.

²⁶ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 29 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 97.

identity as the one who works by God's authority, then they are properly understood."²⁷

Both Brown and Achtemeier et.al. agree that the Johannine sign are miracles that Jesus performed. Brown also expounds on the Johannine signs, there are seven, "(a) Changing water to wine at Cana, (b) Curing the royal official's son at Cana, (c) Curing the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda, (d) Multiplication of the loaves in Galilee, (e) Walking upon the Sea of Galilee, (f) Curing a blind man in Jerusalem, and (g) Raising Lazarus from the dead at Bethany."²⁸ For this project, the wedding at Cana will be utilized. The solutional text for this project is found in the Gospel of John 2: 1-9:

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.² Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.³ When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.'⁴ And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.'⁵ His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.'⁶ Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.⁷ Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim.⁸ He said to them, 'Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.' So they took it.⁹

Just prior to the wedding, Jesus was going about choosing His disciples. (John 1:50) Jesus tells Nathaniel that he shall behold greater things than these. Nathaniel was from Cana and one can only imagine how Nathaniel must have felt after Jesus tells him that he will experience greater signs and wonders. Nathaniel believed that Jesus was the Son of God because Jesus mentioned he saw him under the fig tree and knew he was honest. Nathaniel was looking for Jesus to do great things as he was impressed by Jesus so far. The next verse leads to the wedding which was held in Cana at Gallilee. Cana, per

²⁷ Achtemeier, et.al., *Introducing the New Testament*, 191.

²⁸ Raymond E. Brown, *Gospel According to John*, cxxxix.

Tenney expounds that, “It was in the highlands of Galilee, as one had to go *down* from there to Capernum. . . . Here Jesus performed His first miracle, graciously relieving the embarrassment caused by the shortage of wine at a marriage feast.”²⁹ Mary must have known the family who was having the wedding feast, otherwise, why would Jesus and the disciples have been invited? Raymond Brown intimates a couple theories as to why Mary, Jesus and the disciples were at the wedding, “There is an apocryphal tradition that Mary was the aunt of the bridegroom, whom an early 3rd-century Latin Preface identifies as John son of Zebedee. . . . [T]here could have been an invitation from Nathaniel, who came from Cana.”³⁰

The first wedding in the New Testament shows that when Jesus showed up at the feast, the situation of not having enough wine was rectified through the miracle of Jesus changing water into wine. Achtemeier, et.al. convey:

At a wedding Jesus transforms the water set aside for the Jewish rites of purification into the wine symbolic of the presence of the messianic age. . . .The extravagant provision of wine at the wedding may allude to traditions that in the messianic age the yield of the vineyards would be enormous and spectacular. Jesus now offers the purification of the messianic age, a cleansing already promised under the rubric ‘baptism with Spirit’ spoken of by John. Those who understood Jesus’ sign in this way ‘saw his glory’ (2:11) and believed in him.³¹

It was by this first miracle Jesus performed at the wedding that his disciples really believed in him. If it had not been for Jesus’ presence and Mary’s insistence that Jesus

²⁹ Tenney, *Zondervan Pictorial Dictionary*, 143.

³⁰ Raymond Brown, *Gospel According to John*, 98.

³¹ Achtemeier, et. al. *Introducing the New Testament*, 188-189.

had the ability to fix the problem, it could have been humiliating for the wedding party.

Wedding customs, as described by Tenney:

Marriage customs in the Bible center around the two events of betrothal and wedding. . . . On the day of the wedding the bride is dressed in white, elaborately embroidered robes, bedecked herself with jewels (Isa/61:10) and put on a veil (Gen. 24:65) and a garland. The bridegroom, attended by friends and accompanied by musicians and singers, went to the bride's house; and then after receiving her from her parents with their blessing he conducted the whole party back to his own house. . . . A feast was held at the bridegroom's house.³²

Mary, the mother of Jesus found out the wine had run out. Instinctively, Mary had a reaction that 'Jesus' would know what to do, without hesitation. In a Christian based or Christ-centered relationship or marriage, likewise, the instinctive response to a problem should be that Jesus is the answer. This segment of the story informs of how a deep and true relationship with Jesus could potentially fix any problem that might occur. This story just happens to deal with a wedding feast and running out of wine. It could be a dinner party and there are more people invited and not enough food to feed everyone. Problems occur when you least expect them, and quite simply, Jesus is the answer. When an issue arises, the Word tells us not to be anxious for anything, but prayerful in all things (Phl 4:6). Just ask Jesus!

Jesus, rather begrudgingly, asked his mother why was she looking at him due to the shortage of wine? Who else was there to help? Jesus responded to her insisting on him helping over the lack of wine and by calling his mother, 'woman'. Jesus informed his mother that it was not time for miracles yet, but Mary insisted. It could be assumed that Jesus was reprimanding Mary, but it could have been Jesus was surprised that Mary

³² Tenney, *Zondervan Pictorial Dictionary*, 889.

instinctively called on him when the problem arose. Jesus recognized this was the time for God to work a miracle through him. The disciples were probably just standing around not knowing what to do, or how to help, or maybe leave, but Mary knew without a doubt, without being anxious, that Jesus would fix the situation.

Mary spoke to the servants and asked them to do whatever Jesus told them to do. This Scripture is comparable to Genesis "So when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Then Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, 'Go to Joseph'; whatever he says to you, do." (Gen. 41:55) Even the Pharaoh recognized the power within Joseph just as Mary knew the power of God within Jesus. It is interesting to note that Jesus was always at the right place at the appropriate time, God is strategic and Cana is considered the finest wine country.

There were six waterpots,³³ which according to the Zondervan Pictorial Dictionary imparts, that the waterpots were earthen jars for carrying or holding water, and they were used for purifying purposes. The pots held anywhere from eighteen to twenty gallons each and the rite of purification in the Jewish tradition was both ceremonial and ethical. After the pots were purified, Jesus asks the servants to fill the waterpots with water. The servants completed the task, Jesus requested the servants to draw. It would have been nice to be a fly on the wall when the servants drew out wine instead of water out of the pots! What a mighty God we serve. There is the potential of a miraculous transformation in the congregants of Light of the Community Christian

³³ *Strong's Greek Lexicon*, Power Bible CD v3.9 [2003.01.17], Bronson, MI: Phil Linder, Online Publishing, 1999-2003). Greek Lexicon #5201 for the word waterpots: *udria*, *hudria* meaning a water jar, i.e. receptacle for family supply:--water-pot.

Church if the congregants through Christian education could be spiritually formed with a change in attitudes pertaining to relationships towards a Christ-centered marriage.

The servants took the wine to the bridegroom. The bridegroom tasted the wine and did not know from where it came, he knew it was not the previous wine, it was better, greater than the original beverage. The miracle of this passage is that Jesus was present and everything worked out. When Jesus is recognized and invited into your life, into your situation, into your marriage, it may not be without tribulation, but it will be perfect in God through Jesus Christ. In looking at Judah and Tamar and the wedding, there are some concerns that should be brought to light: (a) Prior to having a worldly relationship, a godly relationship is more important and should be Christ-centered; (b) God must be present and recognized by each individual within a relationship or marriage, without God there are complications that are not easily dealt with; (c) Jesus is the answer, Jesus transforms and alters the ordinary to extraordinary and gives strength to accomplish all things; and (d) Redemption comes by way of God through Jesus Christ who covers all sin and provides grace, including relationships and marriages.

God worked a miracle for Tamar and in assuming her children (heirs) which became Jesus' ancestors, provided a miracle for the wedded couple. The same God that provided liberation and transformation then, is the same God that provides liberation and transformation today. God has never fled the scene, God is omnipresent (all places at all times), omniscient (all knowing), and is omnipotent (all mighty, all powerful, and supreme) and is willing to provide love, peace, prosperity, and a fix to any relationships or marriage that is Christ-centered.

Samuel Laeuchli suggested in *Mithraism in Ostia* that "For many early Christians,

the church provided for the first time a place to belong, a community of hope in what must often have seemed a hopeless world.”³⁴ With all the complications that arise in relationships and marriages in which Christians cling to ungodly people, it is a comfort to know that the church could offer Christian education for spiritual formation through godly values then and now. So much rejection and sheer miserable despondency in relationships have made the term, “marriage” sour. The church must engage their congregations about the importance of marriage and the godly values required to sustain it. Spiritual formation begins with the Pastor and spills over into the congregation until a new spirit emerges over the church, over into the congregants, over their children, and over into their families. God wants Christian leaders to take action to teach congregants and individuals on covenantal love and mutuality. God wants them all to be Christ-centered.

Father Peter Daly in his article “The Church Has Lost Control of Marriage”, published in the *National Catholic Reporter*, commented; “Our county courthouse is across the street from our parish church. Weddings are performed on both sides of the street. We both use the ‘vocabulary’ of marriage, but the words don’t have precisely the same meaning. Let’s face it -- the church has lost control of the cultural conversation on marriage. Just about any parish priest can tell you that. Even devout Catholics often ignore the church’s teaching and views on marriage.”³⁵ Today, it seemingly has become

³⁴ Samuel Laeuchli, *Mithraism in Ostia. Mystery Religion and Christianity in the Ancient Port of Rome (Garrett Theological Studies Number One)* (Evanston, IL: Garrett Theological Seminary, Northwestern University, 1967), 99.

³⁵ Peter Daly, “The Church Has Lost Control of Marriage”, *National Catholic Reporter*, May 20, 2013, accessed February 19, 2014, <http://ncronline.org/print/blogs/parish-diary/church-has-lost-control-marriage>.

the norm to have babies out of wedlock, ungodly relationships, couples living together with no thought of marriage, divorce rates are staggering, no prior counseling before marriage. God must be in the center of the congregants' life, spiritual formation through Christian education is key in spreading the pedagogy that God wants every Christian to live with a Christ-centered focus, a covenantal love and mutuality. Daly states:

The church was the dominant voice on marriage for a long time. For about 1,000 years, it defined marriage in Western Europe. From the time of Gregory the Great (pope from 590 to 604) until the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, the law of the Catholic Church was basically the law of Western Europe on marriage and family life. . . . But if you wanted to get married, you had to come to church. If you wanted an annulment (no divorce) you had to ask the church. . . . The church combined Germanic Tribal law and Roman civil law into the ecclesiastical law of marriage, still reflected in our modern canon law. From the Romans, we got the idea that marriages had to be ratified by a ceremony (*ratum*). From the Germans, we got the idea that marriages had to be consummated by sex (*consumatum*).³⁶

If a marriage was to take place back in the sixteenth century, the church had to be contacted, there was power in the church, prior to the sixteenth century, the bishop had to approve of all marriages. Light of the Community Christian Church stands firm in God's Word. Today, persons do not need the church or Pastors to get married, marriage can take place without permission of the church. Individuals have the option to go down to City Hall and be married by a Judge. Today, the number count for divorce continues to mount. Scriptural values are not pursued, however, they must be taught, practices, and lived. In order to get back to God's natural scheme of Christian marriage, empowering congregants through Christian education on being Christ-centered, not only in their personal life, but also to include their partners and their children must commence.

³⁶ Daly, *The Church Has Lost Control of Marriage*. 1.

Robert L. Stivers, Christine E. Gudorf, Alice Frazer Evans and Robert A. Evans wrote, *Christian Ethics: A Case Method Approach*, character formation was conveyed in this way, “In doing ethics faith is the heart, reason the head, and Christian character the mature union of the two in love. Insofar as faith is a gift of grace, character cannot be taught. Insofar as character is a product of reason, it can be both taught and developed. Faith can change perceptions, habits, and intentions; good teaching and practice can develop them.”³⁷ This pedagogy falls in line with Christian education and spiritual formation. Faith, reason and Christian character are combined in the God-given talents graciously provided to all humanity. Pastors must see that the congregants are empowered with Scriptural values taken from the word of God, the Bible.

Spiritual formation should be used as a transformative learning tool in order to liberate Christians from becoming caught up and entangled in that deceptive web when engaged in ungodly living and unchristian values. Light of the Community Christian Church understands that it’s what you do for Christ that will last. Ecclesiastes gives instruction, “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does have another to help. Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.” (Ecc 9:3-12)

Wedding rituals were just as extravagant in Jesus’ day as they are today. The bridegroom had more of the responsibility as far as the wedding feast was concerned. When marriages are performed today, they are often held in a church, although there are

³⁷ Robert L. Stivers, Christine E. Gudorf, Alice Frazer Evans, and Robert A. Evans., *Christian Ethics: A Case Method Approach* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 9.

many marriages that take place in parks, homes, backyards, and the local courthouses. Being married at one time was of the greatest things a young woman would look forward to, having a husband and children, the excitement and romance today, seems to be a bit melancholy these days. Hebrews 13:4 states “marriage should be held in honor among all”, matrimony should be held in high esteem and respect. Rev. Barnes-Jackson understands that some congregants will not marry nor have the inclination, but having a relationship with God through Jesus Christ is most important. “By many, marriage is lightly regarded—is often made even a subject of jest. Its divine origin, its great object, and its possibilities and influences for good or evil are little thought of, and hence it is often entered into with little idea of its responsibilities or sacred obligations.”³⁸ God ordained marriage and if it is important to God to have established a couple for marriage, then it should not be taken for granted.

The story of Judah and Tamar and the story of Jesus at the wedding in Cana examines how marriage can take on different calamities, from not keeping promises to an inadequate amount of reception beverage. God worked with the faith of Tamar and her son Perez was in direct lineage to Jesus, what a remarkable journey! The story of Jesus in Cana at a wedding which ran out of the beverage for the reception resulted in victory in Jesus turning the water into wine, not just any wine, but the finest of wine. In looking at these two stories for this project, each of the outcomes warranted the magnificence of God to work out the finale for both situations. In similarity to Light of the Community Christian Church, the church in Thyatira was too tolerant, laid back and lenient. The church in Smyrna needed to examine themselves, the church of Sardis was dead

³⁸ *Bible Readings for the Home: A Study of 200 Vital Scripture Topics in Question-and-Answer Form*, Contributed by a Large Number of Bible Scholars (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1940), 688.

spiritually (Rev. 2-3). In this post-modern world, the church continues to take on different dynamics, different conversations, but the main theme throughout is God is supreme and absolute. Jason Vickers stated, "...the church is the sort of community that helps the world to find its way out of darkness, that offers a safe haven for weary travelers, and that maintains spiritual and moral purity."³⁹ To God be the glory for grace, mercy and Christ-centered marriage!

HISTORICAL

The Pre-Nicene Era

Marriage throughout the history of the church has been perceived, dealt with or viewed in a variety of ways. The greatest impact in the life of the church pertaining to marriage has been based upon the individual key characters whose voices have been heard through their writings and teachings and whose influence has made great impressions upon the societies blessed by their presence. Much of what the church has espoused has been founded upon Christian biblical teachings and the personal experiences, wisdom and tradition purported by those key theologians. History has showed the significance of celibacy as compared to the state of matrimony, although other relational patterns also emerged.

Families in the early Roman era were particularly concerned with preserving and upholding the male lineage, while most females were viewed as wives and mothers. There was also this notion of an untainted family, by marrying someone outside their social class. Rosemary Radford Ruether wrote regarding Roman society and how

³⁹ Jason E. Vickers, *Minding the Good Ground: A Theology for Church Renewal* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 24.

marriage was regarded in the first century Rome as, “Because Roman society and its law were also concerned with keeping the lineage of Roman families ‘pure’ from admixture with foreigners, marriage to a person without Roman citizenship was illegal, and the offspring of such a marriage illegitimate. Slaves were also unable to contract legal marriages, nor could senators free and then marry them...A girl child usually was taught only the rudiments of reading before being trained in domestic skills in preparation for marriage.”⁴⁰

There were those that had prejudicial beliefs regarding marriage and how being married was burdensome. Ruether suggests, “Both the Greco-Roman and the Jewish worlds of the first century knew of movements and ideologies that were antifamily...[T]here was a misogynist tradition that saw wives as so great a burden that men were better off not marrying at all.”⁴¹ This type of prejudice regarding families is out of the scope for this project, but it is important to include this as history shows both negative and positive accounts.

Ruether gives further account of marriage within the Greek and Roman first century as, “Marriage was endogamous, favoring spouses within the kin group but outside of the immediate family (ideally cousins). Daughters were sent out as wives to related villages, and their daughters in turn returned to the family as daughters-in-law/wives.”⁴² Marriage was defined within a particular group and were married to their relatives in order not to wed foreigners. She goes on to state, “As we move to the second

⁴⁰ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Christianity and the Making of the Modern Family Ruling Ideologies, Diverse Issues* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2000), 14.

⁴¹ Ruether, *Christianity in the Making*, 21.

⁴² Ruether, *Christianity in the Making*, 17.

generation of the Pauline Christian churches, we find a split opening up in church practice over questions of marriage and family hierarchy. The new freedom in Christ that brought people together in a new family across ethnic lines was still proclaimed, but now in a spiritualized way that did not threaten the subordination owed by wives, children, and slaves to the paterfamilias.”⁴³ The Pauline churches declare Paul’s writings and doctrines, which split the church with the practice of matrimony and family order. Jesus Christ united people in love which no longer intimidated people but gave them hope and salvation in God through Jesus Christ.

Robert McQueen Grant in *Paul in the Roman World: The Conflict at Corinth* expresses, “Musonius, on the other hand, views procreation as an essential feature in marriage.”⁴⁴ It is refreshing to view how Musonius (20-30 C.E. – 101-2 C.E.) portrays procreation as an important element within the state of matrimony and felt marriage is in accordance and harmony with nature. David G. Hunter expresses a move making clergy more sensitive to their congregants regarding marriage as:

Christian writers such as Clement of Alexandria in the late second century borrowed directly from the works of Musonius and Plutarch to forge a Christian theology of marriage that harmonized with the prevailing philosophical ideals. The conversion of the emperor Constantine to Christianity in the early fourth century and the gradual Christianization of the Roman Empire during the subsequent decades caused a shifting and refocusing of Christian thought and practice regarding marriage. . . . [t]he influx of new converts into the church forced Christian Pastors to confront congregations that now had a wider array of values and commitments, not all of which were readily compatible with Christian ideals.⁴⁵

⁴³ Ruether, *Christianity in the Making*, 32-33.

⁴⁴ Robert McQueen Grant, *Paul in the Roman World: The Conflict at Corinth* (Louisville, KY: Westminster, John Knox Press, 2001), 54.

⁴⁵ David G. Hunter, *Marriage in the Early Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press: 1992), 9.

This shift made Pastors more aware of new converts and their ideology of relational obligations through matrimony that may not be of like minds with their fellow worshippers. Both Plutarch (46AD –120AD) and Musonius agree that reproduction be completed within the bonds of matrimony. In order for congregants to become spiritually formed, when Christian education is taught through Scriptural lessons, it might make an impression on them in order to create a righteous seed, to raise up a Christ-centered family.

Judith Evans Grubbs asserts, “Law and Family In Late Antiquity: The Emperor Constantine’s Marriage Legislation” expresses, “Recent works have authoritatively debunked the entrenched belief that Constantine instituted radical changes to laws governing marriage and parenthood in the fourth century because, as the first Christian emperor of ‘Rome,’ he wished to promote a new humane approach to children and regarded marriage as a sacrament and divorce a sin.”⁴⁶ Constantine was married and had children thus the family unit as it could be. The disparity between celibacy and indulgence would continue to be an ongoing battle.

Plutarch has the relationship between a husband and wife as a give and take scenario in order to show love and kindness for one another just as Christ has love for the church. Heather Devere and Preston King convey, “Plutarch’s version of marriage emphasized a personal relationship between husband and wife, duties of reciprocity rather than mastery, and procreation combined with values of love, affection,

⁴⁶ David L. Balch, and Carolyn Osiek, eds., *Early Christian Families In Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, Suzanne Dixon cited Judith Evans Grubbs, Chapter 3 “Sex and the Married Women in Rome.” (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans , 2003), 114.

understanding and mutual sympathy (148).”⁴⁷ Clement of Alexandria (150CE – 215CE), presumably, deduces God’s plan for humanity that marriage and family go hand-in-hand.

Hunter infers, “Despite this somewhat grudging account of the purpose of human sexuality, Clement insists that marriage and procreation are an intrinsic and positive part of God’s plan for the human race.”⁴⁸ It supposedly all comes down to sex, children and the legality of marriage. Ruether suggests, “For Clement of Alexandria, writing in the early third century, the Gnostic search for perfection was to be reintegrated into a Christianized version of the Stoic philosopher-householder. The pleasures of the table and marriage bed had their humble place in created goodness and should be given their due, but also tamed and limited. Thus chaste and intercourse, carried out with dignified motions and solely for the purpose of procreation in the earlier years of a marriage, could be gradually given up altogether in later years as the householder devoted himself to the higher joys of intellectual wisdom.”⁴⁹ Gregory of Nyssa (335-394) regarding marriage epitomizes virginity as, “this inner spiritual process of freeing the self from the greed and fear associated with attachment to transient material things. Marriage and sex were one expression of this attachment, but not the most insistent. Gregory of Nyssa married in his youth, could envision a form of chaste wedlock, gradually given up for higher philosophical pleasures. In this he was unlike Clement.”⁵⁰ In regard to marriage, Gregory of Nyssa believed in marriage and after his wife died, he went to a monastery to reside.

⁴⁷ Heather Devere and Preston King, *The Challenge to Friendship in Modernity* (New York, NY: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000), 178.

⁴⁸ Hunter, *Marriage in the Early Church*, 14.

⁴⁹ Ruether, *Christianity in the Making*, 40.

⁵⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Fathers of the Church, Ascetical Works*, Virginia W. Calahan, trans. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1967), 3-75.

Clement of Alexandria believed in marriage for the purpose of procreation. The early chronicles of marriage seemed to have been based around sex and families. Hunter states, “Early Christian thought on marriage, sexuality, and procreation has had an enormous influence on the subsequent development of Christian ethics and, indeed, on the marital ethos of the Western world more generally.”⁵¹

Anna Lynn Doster and Sarah White wrote an article and compared women’s status in the early Christian Church, explaining, “In the first century Greco-Roman world, women were considered naturally inferior to men. They were viewed as a commodity exchanged by marriage and held to a strict moral standard from which their husbands were excused. They were deprived of any form of independence and forbidden to exercise authority or influence of any kind.”⁵² In contrast to Doster and White, Lydia of Thyatira, a Gentile, was converted to Judaism by Paul.⁵³ According to Karen J. Torjesen, while some women endured the restricted and limited lifestyle of compliance or subordination, Lydia of Thyatira took on a leadership role of entrepreneur in her community and by holding church in her home.⁵⁴

Justo L. Gonzalez wrote a book entitled; *The Story Of Christianity Volume 1: The Early Church To The Dawn Of The Reformation*, he conveyed, “The church also began

⁵¹ Hunter, *Marriage in the Early Church*, 1.

⁵² Anna L. Doster and Sarah White, *Comparing the Status of Women in the Early Christian Church with Their Contemporaries in Greco-Roman Culture at Large*. Dartmouth Apologia. accessed March 26, 2014, <http://dartmouthapologia.org>.

⁵³ Acts 16:14.

⁵⁴ Karen J. Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests: Women’s Leadership in the Early Church & the Scandal of their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity* (San Francisco, California: Harper Collins, 1993), 143.

celebrating marriages at least in the beginning of the second century—when Ignatius of Antioch wrote to Polycarp that all marriages should take place with the knowledge of the bishop.”⁵⁵ Ignatius of Antioch’s letter to Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, indeed lines up with this project in that God should be the couple’s first love. By acknowledgement and endorsement from the bishop, the couple seemingly honors God more than the couple marrying on their own volition.

In the third century, Hunter gave account that Christian writers began writing on the art of abstinence and the repudiation of sexual desire. He communicated, “Although it was a state with serious legal implications, marriage itself was a private act that took place between free persons (slaves could not contract legal marriages until the third century C.E.). No formal contract was required, except when the transfer of a dowry was involved; nor was it necessary for a ceremony to be held, although ceremonies of betrothal and marriage were certainly performed.”⁵⁶ Inequality and injustice for slaves as they could not be married, freedoms some people seemingly take for granted today. Slaves could not be married, they had no choice, yet in this post-modern world, there are no laws prohibiting marriage and yet it is assumed, covenantal love and mutuality is not a path couples may want to take.⁵⁷

St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) is probably one of the most significant thinker and influential mind of the Christian Church throughout its long history. Augustine dedicated his enormous intellectual abilities to the defense and consolidation of the

⁵⁵ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity Volume I: The Early Church To The Dawn Of The Reformation* (New York, New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2010), 114-115.

⁵⁶ Hunter, *Marriage in the Early Church*, 6.

⁵⁷ Peter Kirby, “Historical Jesus Theories,” *Early Christian Writings* 2014, Accessed September 5, 2014. <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/ignatius-polycarp-longer.html>.

Christian faith, writing in a style which was both passionate and appealing to both heart and mind.⁵⁸ St. Augustine was raised as a Christian, but he indulged in worldly pleasures and church was not appealing to him. His mother, St. Monica⁵⁹ raised him in the Christian tradition, but it seemingly was not the path young Augustine wanted to travel. Some Christians today, are bought up in the Christian home and yet, they sometimes fall prey to the pleasures, sensuality and false gratifications of this world. Augustine bore a son by his young mistress, and was not uncommon, but they never married. Noting that marriage was significant, Hunter adds, “The family name could be passed down only to children born in a legal marriage; only the legitimate children could inherit from their father’s estate. . . . If a man and woman were of unequal social status, they would live in concubinage, without the duties of marriage. Augustine of Hippo’s long-term relationship with his concubine is a well-known example.”⁶⁰ His concubine conceived and bore him a son, not unlike some of the congregants today, having children out of wedlock. After much carousing and worldly living, Augustine recounts overhearing a child singing about taking up reading (Latin “tolle lege”)⁶¹ prompting Augustine to read Bible by the words Paul wrote in Romans and a peace came over him and Augustine along with his son was

⁵⁸ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 1994), 12-13. Also see biography of St. Augustine of Hippo, Catholic Encyclopedia: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02084a.htm>.

⁵⁹ Hugh Pope, “St. Monica”, *Catholic Encyclopedia*, accessed September 5, 2014, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10482a.htm>.

⁶⁰ Hunter, *Marriage in the Early Church*, 6-7.

⁶¹ Catholic.org, accessed September 5, 2014, http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=418.

baptized⁶² and began a life of consecration to God and deliberate reflection and meditation on living a monastic lifestyle.

Some people were concerned with children being born out of wedlock. Slaves and illegitimate children were not inheritors of property although they worked the land ran the household. The only inheritors of family possessions were children born within a legal marriage. It is interesting to note that if the couple did not share an equal social standing they could live together. Societal laws and regulations tend to, at times, be the initiator of the ungodliness and unholy living that occurs within the world.

Nicene and Post-Nicene Development

St. Augustine wrote *Confessions and Enchiridion* in 387CE in which he extrapolated about his fierce struggle to overcome his profligate ways and achieve a life of spiritual grace. Augustine stated:

⁶² Midwest Augustinians, "Conversion of Saint Augustine", accessed August 17, 2014, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02084a.htm>.

[H]e freely received and deliberately re-consecrated the religious philosophy of the Greco-Roman world to a new apologetic use in maintain the intelligibility of the Christian proclamation. The center of his 'system' is in the Holy Scriptures, as they ordered and moved his heart and mind. It was in Scripture that, first and last, Augustine found the focus of his religious authority. Grace is God's unmerited love and favor, prevenient and occurrent. It touches man's inmost heart and will. It guides and impels the pilgrimage of those called to be faithful. It draws and raises the soul to repentance, faith, and praise. It transforms the human will so that it is capable of doing good. It relieves man's religious anxiety by forgiveness and the gift of hope. It establishes the ground of Christian humility by abolishing the ground of human pride. God's grace became incarnate in Jesus Christ, and it remains immanent in the Holy Spirit in the Church.⁶³

Augustine was a prolific writer, theologian, preacher and bishop. He opposed those heresies that threatened the Catholic Church. Although Augustine had lived a material and worldly lifestyle, God transformed him and he repented and began living and sacrificing all he had in order to remain humble and in continue in the pathway to God though the Holy Spirit. Even Augustine, finally committed himself to being Christ-centered.

Joan M. Peterson wrote *Handmaid of the Lord: Contemporary Descriptions of Feminine Asceticism in the First Six Christian Centuries*. St. Macrina (330-380), as Peterson espouses, details how Macrina was to be married, but her fiancé died. She vowed never to marry again so Macrina assisted her mother in helping care for her brothers and sisters. Macrina persuaded her mother to abandon the convention of social life and the manners of a woman of the world and to convert their family home into a

⁶³ Albert C. Outler, ed. and trans., St. Augustine, "Confessions and Enchiridion", Christian Classics Ethereal Library, accessed April 18, 2014, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/augustine/confessions.pdf>.

Monastery.⁶⁴ Macrina alongside of her mother, assisted and supported many women who wanted to devote their lives to God. It is interesting to note that Gregory of Nyssa was St. Macrina's brother. Their spiritual family values overflowed into the both of them, each pursuing their own path that exalted and uplifted God in all they accomplished, both placed God first in their lives.

Peter Brown wrote *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* and spoke about John Chrysostom (347-407 CE) as a "most gifted Christian preacher of his age. . . . The themes of marriage, of the household, and of sexuality built so large in his sermons because it was through such themes that John wished to express a new view of the civic community."⁶⁵ Chrysostom's belief was that when two people marry it was not just about lust, it was about bringing two people together to have more power over their desires. Simply put, it appears that lust has taken over love when it comes to relationships leading to ungodliness and wickedness. He shared; "Later in the fourth and early fifth centuries, John Chrysostom and Augustine of Hippo retrieved some of these ideas to provide a new marital morality for Christians living in a changed social and political context."⁶⁶ Augustine's stance on marriage was that it did not only involve procreation, but also the social aspect of marriage. Two people coming together for purely a sexual nature, was not the only reason for marriage.

⁶⁴ Joan M. Peterson, ed. and trans., *Handmaid of the Lord: Contemporary Descriptions of Feminine Asceticism in the First Six Christian Centuries* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1996), 56.

⁶⁵ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1988), 306.

⁶⁶ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 9.

Hunter surmised: “Marriage is acknowledged to be part of God’s plan, established at the beginning of creation for the purpose of procreation.”⁶⁷ This confirmed that if in the beginning God created Adam and Eve to be partners, husband and wife, God is about family, about lineage, unity, creating a righteous seed. Peter Brown affirmed, “We must, however, realize that it was the shadow-side of Chrysostom’s great hope—the creation of a new form of urban community through the reform of the Christian household.”⁶⁸ This new Christian household Chrysostom (347-407) was hoping to establish a new community that no longer included the overtone of irreverent behaviors and lifestyles but one of a more Christian connotation, a community exercising Scriptural and biblical values.

The emergence of celibacy for clergy and deacons bought on a different mindset for ordained persons. There were those persons that deemed celibacy for married ordained individuals should be implemented for religious purposes. Bernard Verkamp regarding sexual relations with wives imparted, “Western synods and episcopal decrees at Rome (in 308), Milan (in 390), and Carthage (in 401), reiterated the demand that the ordained, including deacons, give up sexual relations with their wives.”⁶⁹ Anne Llewellyn Barstow was in disagreement with Verkamp regarding marriage and celibacy as, “The Eastern church followed a different path of development from the Western, allowing celibate and married priests to coexist. In 692, the Trullan Synod, dominated by Eastern bishops, would rule that deacons and priests who were already married before their

⁶⁷ Hunter, *Marriage in the Early Church*, 28.

⁶⁸ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 309.

⁶⁹ Bernard Verkamp, “Cultic Purity and the Law of Celibacy,” *Review for Religious*, no. 30 (March 1971), 199-217.

ordination could—indeed must—continue to live with their wives. The Western church rejected the canon of this council that allowed clerical marriage, and thus began a division between East and West that was to widen into a final split in 1054.⁷⁰ Quite rapidly the western church moved to a totally celibate priesthood. How was it that married ordained persons had to practice celibacy, sexual relations would be forbidden? For this project, sexual relations within the confines of marriage could be of more value for the relationship than outside of the scope of marriage which could lead to complications for the couple.

Middle Ages (476-1350)

The Middle Ages and marriage were not always about falling in love, marrying the person you wanted to marry, it was more of an arrangement between families of the two parties involved. Marriage was a sacrament and the Catholic Church provided the following information regarding this sacrament:

The Church gained power through the Middle Ages, twelfth century, and marriage was one of the sacraments. *AmericanCatholic.org* website provides information regarding the fifth sacrament: ‘The Latin word *sacramentum* ‘a sign of the sacred.’ The seven sacraments are ceremonies that point to what is sacred, significant and important for Christians. For Catholics the *Sacrament of Marriage*, or Holy Matrimony, is a public sign that one gives oneself totally to this other person. It is a public statement about God: the loving union of husband and wife speaks of family values and also God’s values.’⁷¹

⁷⁰ Anne Llewellyn Barstow, *Married Priests and the Reforming Papacy: The Eleventh-Century Debates* (Toronto, CA: Edwin Mellen Press, 1982), 16, 54.

⁷¹ “The Seven Catholic Sacraments,” *AmericanCatholic.org*, accessed March 12, 2014, <http://www.americancatholic.org/features/special/default.aspx?id=29>.

Julian of Norwich (1342-1416) was a well-known mystic and anchoress (a deeply religious woman who chose to live a solitary life in confined quarters called an anchorage which consisted of a single small cell). She wrote *Revelations of Divine Love* in the fourteenth century, revelations that were given to her while she endured the sickness. These sixteen revelations espoused her mystical and spiritual views of God and the Passion of the Christ. Julian lived her life totally and devoutly for God.⁷²

In contrast to marriage, Julian chose to live as she did, and not only felt a calling on her own life but also in the life of others. This was evident in her saying, “I saw and understode ful sekirly that in every soule that shal be save is a godly wille that never assent to synne, ne never shalle; which wille is so good that it may never willen ylle, but eve[r]more continually it will good and werkyth good in the syte of God. (53.83-5).”⁷³ Julian obviously felt that the will of God is in every person moving them to a higher good although she personally made the choice to completely withdraw from society and the world. In addressing a person’s higher calling, Christopher Abbott in his analysis of Julian of Norwich’s writings, in *Julian of Norwich Autobiography and Theology*, stated “In order to make credible her sense of the individual as *minor ecclesia*, Julian must establish that the union with God and each person is real, absolute and unbreakable.”⁷⁴ Speaking that *minor ecclesia* is possibly the small church in each individual, a domestic

⁷² Julian of Norwich, “Revelations of Divine Love,” *Christian Classics Ethereal Library*, trans. Grace Warrack, accessed April 18, 2014, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/julian/revelations.html>.

⁷³ Julian of Norwich. Quoted in Christopher Abbott, *Julian of Norwich: Autobiography and Theology* (Cambridge, MA: D. S. Brewer, 1999), 112.

⁷⁴ Christopher Abbott, *Julian of Norwich: Autobiography and Theology* (Cambridge, MA: D. S. Brewer, 1999), 125.

church. Abbott speaks of this in reference to the individual's substantial union with God and as the foundation of Julian's conception of the human person.⁷⁵

Julian also spoke to the 'motherhood of God' and how important it is to live a godly life in order to be reconciled to God in the afterlife. Abbott suggested, "In Julian's scheme the image of the divine mother properly applies to Christ since, in quite specific ways, it symbolizes creation and incarnation, and all that these imply for the relationship between God and human beings."⁷⁶ This godly union they speak of is essential to any individual seeking to bond themselves to another in approaching relationships that eventually lead to marriage.

Age of Reformers (1500 – 1685)

The Reformation began strong covenantal communities, bringing worship to the people on a more individual and personal relationship with God. This era brought about many reforms, reorganizations and restructuring. Martin Luther (1483-1546) was renowned for writing the *95 Theses*⁷⁷ and attacking the Roman Catholic Church for its dishonest observation of luxury and extravagance to pardon sin, which ignited the Protestant Reformation. Luther also exhorted on the sacrificial distortions of the mass and priestly authority. Roland H. Bainton conveyed that Martin Luther had strong views on marriage. Bainton stated, "[H]e walked in the steps of Paul and Augustine. The whole institution of marriage was set by Luther within the framework of family relationships. There was no

⁷⁵ Abbott, *Julian of Norwich*, 112.

⁷⁶ Abbott, *Julian of Norwich*, 125.

⁷⁷ Martin Luther and Stephen J. Nichols, "*Martin Luther's 95 Theses*" (Seattle, WA: CreateSpace Independent, 2012).

room left for the exercise of unbridled individualism.”⁷⁸ Luther considered marriage as an act from God, just as in this project promotes a relationship with God. Luther proclaimed the following:

For Luther, marriage has been given to men and women by God in Paradise as the basic unit of society for companionship and procreation. Since the Fall, all—that is, all *men*—had been afflicted with sinful lust. Thus the celibate ideal was both wrong and impossible, as it went against both created and fallen nature. All *should* marry because God’s intention from the beginning had been to unite men and women in marital union and bid them to procreate. Almost all should marry because the lustful urges that had arisen from the Fall could be contained without sin only in marriage.⁷⁹

The fall, including all people for Luther, seemingly was troublesome and caused major problems in dealing with sexual desires and having a sinful nature; which is the basis for this project. Christian education could be the catalyst that could help restore Christ-centered relationships prior to engaging a sinful relationship.

When it came to marriage as a sacrament, Luther did not agree, he discarded marriage as one of the sacraments. He believed that baptism and the Lord’s Supper were sacraments. However, if marriage is from God, why should it not be one of the sacraments? Susan Kurrant-Nunn wrote about Luther and his thoughts on the sacraments as, “Based on his study of the New Testament, Luther accepted only baptism and the Eucharist as sacraments that imparted redeeming grace. He rejected as sacraments marriage, ordination, penance, confirmation, and extreme unction.”⁸⁰ Extreme unction

⁷⁸ Roland H. Bainton, *A Life of Martin Luther: Here I Stand* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1950), 306.

⁷⁹ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Christian in Society*, vol. 44 (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1966).

⁸⁰ Susan C. Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Ritual: An Interpretation of Modern Germany* (London, UK: Routledge, 1997), 13-16.

was considered a sacrament of the last rites of an individual. Luther was an Augustinian monk who took the vows of celibacy and lived in one house, a monastery, and spent his life in contemplation and prayer.⁸¹ Luther wrote a sermon on prayer and marriage in it he proclaimed, “If God himself did not give the wife or the husband, anything can happen. Those who want to enter into the estate of marriage should learn from this that they should earnestly pray to God for a spouse. For the sage says that parents provide goods and houses for their children but a wife is given by God alone [Prov. 19:14], everyone according to his need, just as Eve was given to Adam by God alone.”⁸² For Luther, prayer and meditation to God for the spouse is essential in providing the proper partner. Prayer and meditation are two of the spiritual disciplines that will be utilized for this project. To be in reflection of what God has in store for each individual is imperative and it is through prayer and supplication that God’s voice is heard.

The Council of Trent was convened by the Roman Catholic Church and reviewed many subjects, such as Bible canon, original sin, salvation, marriage, and celibacy.⁸³ James A. Brundage gives his account on celibacy and marriage during the Council of Trent as follows, “The Council of Trent, convened for eighteen years from 1545 to 1563 to formulate a doctrinal and Pastoral response to the Reformation, resoundingly negated the Protestant rejection of the superiority of celibacy over marriage. This latter it saw as

⁸¹ Robert E. Smith, “Martin Luther, The Babylonian Captivity of the Church A Prelude 1520 Jesus” eds. Wesley R. Smith and Lucas C. Smith, Walther Library, Concordia Theological Seminary, accessed March 1, 2015, <http://www.lutherdansk.dk/Web-babylonian%20Captivitate/Martin%20Luther.htm>.

⁸² Martin Luther, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, Timothy F. Lull and William R. Russell, eds. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 387-388.

⁸³ “Council of Trent”, Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed August 16, 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/604238/Council-of-Trent>.

denigrating marriage. The mandatory celibacy of all priests were reaffirmed, even though some Catholic humanists pushed for change in this rule.”⁸⁴ The push for marriage was criticized and unfairly denounced the Protestant Reformation and affirmed that celibacy was greater than marriage, but if marriage was the choice, it should be done in the presence of a priest and two witnesses.

There was also a push for women to have a dowry. A dowry could include a type of financial offering to the family being wed into. Encyclopedia Britannica Online regarding marriage and dowry suggests, “[D]owry, the money, goods, or estate that a woman brings to her husband or his family in marriage. Most common cultures that are strongly patrilineal and that expect women to reside with or near their husband’s family (patrilocality), dowries have a long history in Europe, South Asia, Africa and other parts of the world.”⁸⁵ It appears amongst more cultures that a dowry came along with the female and the items included were seemingly how much she was worth upon being wed. It was also conveyed regarding the dowry:

In medieval and Renaissance Europe, the dowry frequently served not only to enhance the desirability of a woman for marriage but also to build the power and wealth of great families and even to determine the frontiers and policies of states. The use of dowries more or less disappeared in Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries. In some other places, however, dowries grew in popularity at the end of the 20th century, even when declared illegal or otherwise discouraged by governments. In South Asia, for instance, parents of the groom have sometimes demanded compensation for their son’s higher education and future earnings, which the bride would ostensibly share.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 568-569.

⁸⁵ “Dowry”, Encyclopedia Britannica, last modified November 24, 2014, accessed March 12, 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/170540/dowry>.

⁸⁶ *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, accessed March 12, 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/170540/dowry>.

Rocky M. Mizra wrote about the dowry between John Rolfe, a Virginia settler and Pocahontas “who brought a dowry to the marriage that included a large amount of land.”⁸⁷

The Age of Reformers brought about many political and religious changes. There were splits within the churches and many different viewpoints discussed and argued, won and lost. The church went through many changes, continues to go through changes. Luther translated the Bible into German, promoting the need for the word to be translated into different languages for all to read. This era brought about other reformations such as the Calvinists, and the Wesleyans. John Wesley was a pioneer for the United Methodist Church. “Wesley and the early Methodists were practically concerned about inviting people to experience God’s grace and to grow in their knowledge and love of God through disciplined Christian living. Although Wesley shared with many other Christians a belief in salvation by grace, he combined them in a powerful way to create distinctive emphases for living the full Christian life.”⁸⁸ John Calvin was a reformer and Calvinism is a division off of the Protestant church. Calvin believed in marriage as covenantal. The Calvinists in regard to marriage believe:

⁸⁷ Rocky M. Mizra, *The Rise and Fall of the American Empire: A Re-Interpretation of History, Economics and Philosophy: 1492-2006* (Bloomington, IN: Trafford Publishing, 2007), 83.

⁸⁸ The United Methodist Church, “Our Wesleyan Heritage”, accessed September 5, 2014, <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/our-wesleyan-heritage>.

The Calvinist tradition, established in mid-sixteenth century Geneva, set out a covenantal model of marriage. This model confirmed many of the Lutheran theological and legal reforms, but cast them in a new ensemble. Marriage, John Calvin and his followers taught, was not a sacramental institution of the church, but a covenantal association of the entire community. A variety of parties participated in the formation of this covenant. The marital parties themselves swore their betrothals and espousals before each other and God—rendering all marriages triparty agreements, with God as third party witness, participant, and judge.⁸⁹

A marriage should involve God and community, the couple should have the assistance of the church, the community and family in difficult times. For this project, it is imperative that an individual should first develop a Christ-centered relationship then there could be the potential to move toward a Christ-centered marriage.

Assault on Marriage From Slavery (1501-1865)

Slavery was possibly one of the most horrendous crimes committed on a people. The Slave trade tore apart, pillaged, robbed and murdered many African Americans and their families. Slavery brought on a different connotation for marriage. There were some married slaves, and there were those who were separated from their loved ones and began relationships with those they lived with. History books write about the horrors of slavery, but it must be remembered, prior to slavery, African families lived together as community.⁹⁰ When they were brought to America the families were disbanded from one another, torn apart, husbands from wives, children from mothers and fathers. In order to maintain the semblance of family it took on a different connotation, whatever slaves were

⁸⁹ Net Industries, “Protestantism-Calvinism”, accessed September 6, 2014, <http://family.jrank.org/pages/1342/Protestantism-Calvinism.html>.

⁹⁰ African Holocaust, “Africa Before Slavery”, accessed September 7, 2014, http://www.africanholocaust.net/news_ah/africa%20before%20slavery.htm.

with you on the plantation were your family. Slavery was a travesty that must never be forgotten, it was an attack on marriage and the family.

During the African Holocaust of enslavement marriage was pointless if you were owned by the slave master. A person could be sold off at any instant. Everything is temporary-commitment is pointless when someone owns you. And we must regardless of our marital status be bold enough to see the errors which are growths of enslavement. The destruction of people systems, the death of things that define our humanity. The temporariness of the enslaved reality meant also commitment was also fleeting. Long term arrangements in areas of marriage and parenting were nonexistent. And today the habits of enslaved people still run our relationships today.⁹¹

The assault of the slave master and concubinage was detestable. The master of the plantation owned the slaves, and could do whatever he wanted with them. In order to increase the amount of slaves, the master raped the slave women and the children from this assault, belonged to the master, which augmented and multiplied. Angela Y. Davis wrote about his travesty, “As females, slave women were inherently vulnerable to all forms of sexual coercion. If the most violent punishments of men consisted in floggings and mutilations, women were flogged and mutilated, as well as raped. Rape, in fact, was an uncamouflaged expression of the slaveholder’s economic mastery and the overseer’s control over Black women as workers.”⁹² History shows the pattern of dehumanizing slaves to the point of separation of house slaves and field slaves. It was even spoken of the lighter complexion of slaves were more prone to be in the house as compared to the darken complexion being in the fields.⁹³

⁹¹ African Holocaust, “African Marriage”, accessed September 7, 2014, <http://www.africanmarriage.info/#feminism>.

⁹² Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race, & Class* (New York, NY: First Vintage Books Edition, 1981), 14.

⁹³ Davis, *Women & Race*, 15.

Although some families were torn apart and some were killed, yet in Virginia, there are stories of where there were an abundance of married couples and families living together. Some families were never reunited, they just assimilated and had to carry on. Herbert G. Gutman, wrote *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom (1750-1925)*, in this book he wrote about married slave families in Montgomery, York and Princess County, Virginia in regards to the number of married slaves, families including husband, wife and child or children, father or mother with child or children stated :

Montgomery, York and Princess Anne households with two or more residents had in them either a husband and wife or two parents and their children. The more mobile York and Princess Anne blacks had fewer single-parent households than the Montgomery blacks. Black York, Montgomery, and Princess Anne families also cast doubt on the common belief that large numbers of slaves and ex-slaves viewed the single-parent household as a conventional domestic arrangement. Hardly any young York and Montgomery women headed such households. Five York women aged fifteen to nineteen—less than 3 percent of all women in that age group—lived with a child and without a husband. Two women aged fifteen to nineteen headed Montgomery County households. Ten times that many fifteen-to-nineteen-year-old Montgomery women lived with either a husband or a husband and their children. Women aged forty and over headed about one-third of male-absent Montgomery households, and just over half of such York households were headed by women that old.⁹⁴

Gutman's insight into the slaves in Virginia gave a new glimmer of light on the dim and dismal picture of slavery. It was noteworthy to see that only three percent of women lived with a child and without a husband. Yet, Frances Smith Foster wrote an article "Till Death or Distance Do Us Part? Marriage Ideals And Family In Antebellum African America" divulged;

⁹⁴ Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom 1750-1925* (New York, NY: Random House, 1976), 11.

Slavery was not just a sin and a shame; it was evil incarnate! Slavery in antebellum U.S. America worked only if it could kill the soul! Slavery could not—and did not—destroy the souls of all black folk. Two reasons for our endurance and our triumph were families and marriages. In short, this research reaches two basic points: a) Slavery did not destroy the black family. Indeed, it was the strength and viability of African-American families that made it possible for our people not only to survive but to multiply and thrive, b) While marriage was illegal for slaves, it was a common occurrence in antebellum African America, and ‘jumping the broom’ was just one of the marriage rituals during this time. In fact, marriage was highly valued as a life-time relationship.⁹⁵

Between Gutman and Foster’s points are valuable. Gutman informs us that history is sometimes written untruthfully, in order to make individuals think slaves did not have any marriage or family values. Foster understands slavery to be reprehensible and a disgrace. Slavery dealt the African American much dishonor and humiliation. Although there were some families that survived, such as in Virginia, there were so many countless other family units that were torn apart. Yet both Gutman and Foster agree that because of marriage and family ties, the soul of the slave overcame, there was a stronger power that guided these people, it was God.

Women have had to deal with injustice and inequality throughout history, outside of marriage. Unfair laws and discrimination along with bias’ of women in the workplace, continue to be in place and women are fighting for their place in society. When the World Wars broke out and men had to go fight, this left the women at home to be the breadwinners. They had to go out and look for work and many had to take menial labor jobs in order to tackle day-to-day problems.

⁹⁵ Frances Smith Foster, *Till Death or Distance Do Us Part? Marriage Ideals and Family In Antebellum African America* (New York, NY: Oxford Press, 2010), 84-86.

Jacqueline Jones offered her synopsis of injustice to women:

The forces that shaped the institution of human bondage in the American South endured, albeit in altered form, long after the Thirteenth Amendment was ratified by the states; whether black women toiled in a sweltering Virginia tobacco factory in the 1890's or in the kitchen of a Chicago white woman in the 1950's, they felt the oppressive force of racial and gender ideologies, ideas of social difference that until the mid-1960's carried the weight of law. Throughout American history, black women's meager wages—and in the case of slavery, lack of any wages at all—stood in stark contrast to their strenuous labors in the workforce and at home.⁹⁶

Whether black or white, women have suffered in this country. All women united have had injustices and inequality issues, yet, their fight continues and the battle is far from over.

The Rise of Industrialism (1760-1850)

Joan Perkin gives account of the industrial age from the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries. There was a rise in material factories producing all types of cloth and wages were low. Some of the women took in piecework and were able to work from home Perkin communicates, “Married women with young children accepted such work because it allowed them to stay at home, rather than having to find child care.”⁹⁷ Some of the women were clamoring to get out of the house, so this age of Industry was one of great change and exhilaration for women. It gave them an outlet to show their skills and competence, becoming a part of earning wages for the family.

⁹⁶ Jacqueline Jones, *Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black women, Work and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1985), 1.

⁹⁷ Joan Perkin, *Victorian Women* (Washington Square, NY: New York University Press, 1993), 189-90.

Yaffa C. Draznin gave account of how women defined their leadership roles in early England. They were characterized as matriarch of the home through instruction to household staff on how to maintain the home. In some households the wife managed the financial resources for the family. The mother also was teacher and nurturer for the children.⁹⁸ The Victorian woman was not too different than the American woman. Both led their homes and cared for their families.

Social Gospel Movement (1870-1920)

This era brought on a need for social reform in order to meet the needs of the people through the mediation of the church. Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918) was one of the Social Gospel Movements major theologians. He stated, “The social gospel is the old message of salvation, but enlarged and intensified. The individualistic gospel has taught us to see the sinfulness of every human heart and has inspired us with faith in the willingness and power of God to save every soul that comes to him.”⁹⁹ Per Rauschenbush, every human has some amount of sin within, but it is God through Jesus Christ that can save everyone. Jesus came to save everyone, not just the elite. This movement brought on more awareness of the betterment of the social order through biblical means.

Rauschenbush addressed the need for love and how it brings human beings together, “But love is the social instinct that binds man and man together and makes them indispensable to one another. Whoever demands love, demands solidarity. Whoever sets

⁹⁸ Yaffa C. Draznin, *Victorian London's Middle-Class Housewife: What She Did All Day* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 71-119.

⁹⁹ Walter Rauschenbush, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York, NY: MacMillan Company, 1917), 5.

love first, sets fellowship high.”¹⁰⁰ This movement bought on the social aspect of labor unions, child labor laws, communal injustices and shared discrimination. It is through the teachings and principles of Jesus that are the foundations for this project in order to win souls for God through Jesus Christ for a discipleship toward a Christ-centered relationship toward marriage.

Even an atheist philosopher, Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), in the tome *Marriage and Morals*, touches on conditions and capabilities of staying with one partner in marriage when stating, “When we look around the world at the present day and ask ourselves what conditions seem on the whole to make for happiness in marriage and what for unhappiness, we are driven to a somewhat curious conclusion, that the more civilized people become the less capable they seem of lifelong happiness with one partner.”¹⁰¹ Russell surmises that civilized or cultured people supposedly are not able to engage one partner for a lifetime. Christian education could be the motivation needed in order for congregants to intentionally acknowledge the need for Christ in their lives. It could be effective towards rectifying and repairing the sinful nature residing in their homes and families.

This movement also involved heavy duty theologians such as, DuBois, Higginbotham, Adam Clayton Powell, Baptist educator Nannie Burroughs, Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King, Jr., just to name a few, were inspirational and dedicated in the race war and how African Americans were treated. This movement brought about the need for racial equality and justice for all.

¹⁰⁰ Walter Rauschenbush, *The Social Principles of Jesus* (New York, NY: The Woman’s Press, 1917), 18.

¹⁰¹ Bertrand Russell, *Marriage and Morals* (New York, NY: Horace Livebright Inc, 1929), 135.

Twentieth – Twenty-First Century (1900-2000)

As the twentieth century dawns, the terms, for better or worse appear to remain dormant and silent. Within the confines of the church, marriage seems to be going through a type of metamorphosis. Age for marriage, for the most part, seemingly has gone from marrying young to slightly older. The Pew Research Center clamours that marriage has been deteriorating for quite a few years. Pew asserts:

Americans are putting off life's big milestones. Today, the median age at first marriage is 29 for men and 27 for women-the highest in modern history. (In 2013, more than one-in-four (26%) of people ages 18 to 32 were married. But in 1960, well over half (65%) of Americans were.) Mothers are also waiting longer to have children. In 1960, women ages 15 to 24 accounted for 40% of mothers with infants. By 2011, that number had dropped to 22%.¹⁰²

These statistics show that individuals are waiting longer to marry, some do not marry at all, women are becoming mothers later in life. The conversation should take place within the church about a relationship with Christ first, then marriage and family follow. Not having God, through Jesus Christ in their life is possibly one of the main reasons why marriage is not essential in the lives of some congregants. Having relationships with partners that are not in church is another issue. It is time for the church to step up and bring the word holy living and being a holy family back into the pulpit. Light of the Community Christian through Christian education encourages the congregants to be respectable and live in a covenantal relationship with God through Jesus Christ at the center.

¹⁰² Jens Manuel Krogstad, *Pew Research Center*, "5 Facts About the Modern American Family," April 30, 2014. Accessed September 6, 2014. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/30/5-facts-about-the-modern-family/>.

Willard Rodgers and Arland Thornton share the following percentages that deal with the ages most young people marry. Age is key when it comes to a person being mature enough to marry and deal with a family.

The ages at which young men and women marry are highly concentrated, particularly for women. Men marry later than women, but most men and women marry during their twenties. Between the 1950s and 1970s, about 75 percent of women had married by age 25, whereas 75 percent of men had married by age 27—although both young men and young women are not marrying as early as they did in the 1950s. During these ages, on average, 13 percent of women married every year, compared with about 11 percent of men.¹⁰³

The numbers above show that most couples marry in their twenties. They were marrying at younger ages in the fifties. Age should be taken into consideration, but even more is the union that exists between the couple and Christ. Jean Leclercq, states, “. . .the conjugal metaphor lends itself to the expression of the union which exists between Christ and his Church. The Church herself is the communion between souls. Both she and each individual soul are symbolic, the one of the other, because they are inclusive of each other. And here again we are in the presence of three realities which, though distinct, are united: the Church, the individual soul, and the love which unites them.”¹⁰⁴ It is significant to note that the first of the three realities is the church. The church is the main ingredient, the main source that helps make the marriage sustainable.

Karl Barth (1886-1968) remarks on marriage and how God should be an integral and essential part of this union states;

¹⁰³ Willard Rodgers, and Arland Thornton, *Changing Patterns of First Marriage in the United States* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1985), 265-279.

¹⁰⁴ Jean Leclercq, *Monks on Marriage* (New York, NY: The Seabury Press, 1982), 82-83.

As marriage is the matter of a special divine calling, it is wholly subject to the divine command. A true and obedient marriage is one which in all its elements fulfills this special divine vocation. Marriage as a life-partnership is in itself a highly significant work. The permanence of marriage is the content of the divine command. Where this divine fidelity and the resultant stability of its creaturely partner is manifest and recognized, we can appreciate the majestic decision in regard to marriage recorded in Mark 10:9 and Matthew 19:6: ‘What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder.’¹⁰⁵

This project goes along with Barth and is in agreeance that God should be in center of the relationship. Marriage with Christ should be the first step, once this relationship is established and valued, God can then work in the person’s life in order to choose the mate best suited for them.

David Popenoe informs us that, “While the new father has been emerging gradually for most of this century, it is only in the past thirty years that we have witnessed the enormous increase in absent fathers. . . . The main reason for contemporary father absence is the dramatic decline of marriage.”¹⁰⁶ Working with both individuals through the utilization of spiritual disciplines, could make a difference in the absent father or the marriage partners. Families are a blessing from God and as Christians, we should take a stand for God. A retired Pastor, Rev. Dr. J. Thomas Johnson shared on many occasions that we are born into three families, the family you are born into, married into and baptized into. Every one of these families is important to God and each individual should treat them with gratefulness and humility.

¹⁰⁵ Karl Barth, *On Marriage* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1968), 2, 9, 30.

¹⁰⁶ David Popenoe, *Life Without Father: Compelling New Evidence that Fatherhood and Marriage Are Indispensable for the Good of the Children and Society* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1966), 2.

Lawrence Casler wrote about the necessity of marriage, he conveyed that living in the past is not going to help us here and now. The past is useful for note taking, but we have to move forward and develop new strategies for transformation of the individual and taking marriage to include God through Jesus Christ. He wrote, “There is, in fact, the danger that too great a concentration on marriage’s past history may blind us to questions of current functioning and future prospects. So while we may be respectful of the past, and willing to learn from it, we should not permit ourselves to be governed by it.”¹⁰⁷ Marriage took so many turns during its history that women stopped taking what was handed to them. Women’s movements eventually provided them some equal rights. Women began declaring how many children they were willing to bear, or adopt if incapable of bearing them.

There is a revolution taking place within the family, there is a rebellion where women are making strides in being breadwinners and forming marriages that are outside of the church. Frances K. Goldscheider and Linda J. Waite suggested that two revolutions confront the family, they said; “The first revolution is taking place inside the family, where changes in sex roles, which have increased women’s participation in the paid labor force, are now challenging the rules underlying traditional marriage. The second revolution is going on outside the family, where unmarried people are experiencing the privacy, dignity, and authority (and sometimes loneliness) of living in their own home rather than living in a family as a child, relative, or lodger.”¹⁰⁸ More women are returning to school, due to the economy, and are placing their child rearing

¹⁰⁷ Lawrence Casler, *Is Marriage Necessary?* (New York, NY: Human Sciences Press, 1974), 1.

¹⁰⁸ Frances K. Goldscheider and Linda J. Waite, *New Families, No Families? The Transformation of the American Home* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1991), 1.

and marriages on hold while they educate themselves. They are envisioning better lives instead of being tied down to lives of uncertainty. Goldscheider and Waite continue by stating “beginning seriously in the 1960s, non family living spread to young adults, who discovered that they now had the option of living independently before marriage.”¹⁰⁹ This lifestyle has definitely continued to take place all the way into present times. The living independently, apart from family has had serious repercussions when it comes to marriage. Once a young adult has a taste of freedom, they are not so interested in sharing space with someone else. Goldscheider and Wait also shared, “Our view is that children’s experiences in the home shape the families they later form.”¹¹⁰ Children learn from their environment, some are in homes that would not imitate their parents, based on their lifestyle. Their parents may be abusive or there could be many issues in the home. There might only be one parent in the home which could cause the child to not want to marry or remain single.

When Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and protesters marched from Selma, they honored a woman named Viola Greg Liuzzo.¹¹¹ Liuzzo was admired for being a civil rights activist in the 1960’s, and she is the only white woman honorably mentioned in the Montgomery Civil Rights Memorial. She was married and a mother of five children. It had to be tough for her family, yet she stood with other African Americans for equal and civil rights. She was murdered for her beliefs. In the 60’s, family values were strong and

¹⁰⁹ Goldscheider and Waite, *New Families*, 2.

¹¹⁰ Goldscheider and Waite, *New Families*, 6.

¹¹¹ Encyclopedia of Alabama, “Viola Gregg Liuzzo”, accessed September 6, 2014, <http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/face/Article.jsp?id=h-1377>.

durable. Some people were willing to demonstrate the unfair practices and unequal sub-standard living conditions in order to bring about a change.

TV and music culture had its effect on marriage and family. Television had its families that illustrated and explained about injustices individuals had to deal with. Some of the shows were, *Good Times*, *All In The Family*, *The Jeffersons*, *The Brady Bunch*, *Sanford and Son*, *Julia*, etc. Each of the above families dealt with current issues of the day and also showed there is strength in numbers and in family. In looking back at some famous people, such as Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and President John F. Kennedy, there were stories of infidelity within their families which could cause distraction from what some people thought were the perfect family. Some families go through turmoil and never find their way back to the covenantal state of marriage. For the family that keeps God through Jesus Christ at the center of their relationship, forgiveness and being able to release the sin could be more tolerable than the couple not spiritually formed.

Clifton L. Taulbert wrote a book entitled *Eight Habits of the Heart: Embracing the Values that Build Strong Families and Communities*. He emphasized eight family values needed in order for success and victory within the family; nurturing attitude, dependability and responsibility, friendship, brotherhood, high expectations, courage and hope.¹¹² All eight of these principles relate to any era at any time. An important feature of this book was that family meant community. Communities looked out for each other, the neighbors would sit on their front porches and watch to see what the children were doing, what people were into and be watch dogs of their neighborhood. Although Taulbert did

¹¹² Clifton L. Taulbert, *Eight Habits of the Heart: Embracing the Values that Build Strong Families and Communities* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1997), 9.

not mention spiritual development, for this project, spiritual formation would be the first necessary step.

Music and movie stars have gone through transformations over the years. There were family bands like, The Jackson Five, The Osmonds, Pointer Sisters, Captain and Tennille, Sister Sledge, The Partridge Family, etc. who not only sang together, but built an empire around the whole family. Music spoke about not only being in love but also uplifted marriage and family with songs that include “We Are Family by Sister Sledge.”¹¹³ Sly and the Family Stone sang a song, “Family Affair” and the O’Jays sang “Family Reunion”. God established the first family in the Garden and families are in critical need of being bought back to a state of being Christ-centered.

Movie stars, Bill Cosby drew quite a lot of criticism. Michael Eric Dyson wrote a book entitled, *“Is Bill Cosby Right? Or Has the Black Middle Class Lost Its Mind?”* Dyson was agreeing with Cosby and his conversation regarding black people and their views on family and raising children. Dyson conveys:

For those who overlook the uneven history of black engagement with the race’s social dislocations and moral struggles-and who conveniently ignore Cosby’s Johnny-come-lately standing as a racial critic-Cosby is an ethical pioneer, a racial hero. In this view, Cosby is brave to admit that ‘lower economic people’ are ‘not parenting’ and are failing the civil rights movement by ‘*not* holding up their end in this deal.’ Single mothers are no longer ‘embarrassed because they’re pregnant without a husband.’ A single father is no longer ‘considered an embarrassment if he tries to run away from being the father’ of his child. As a cruel coda, Cosby even suggests to the black poor that ‘God is tired of you.’¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Sister Sledge, “We Are Family,” 1979, accessed September 6, 2014, <https://www.google.com/#q=song+we+are+family>.

¹¹⁴ Michael Eric Dyson, *Is Bill Cosby Right?: Or Has The Black Middle Class Lost Its Mind?* (New York, NY: Basic Civitas Books, 2005), 3-4.

Dyson makes his point clear about Cosby. Yes, it was disheartening that Cosby spoke out about how the poor lived, but other actors and comedians were laughing at issues and Cosby was bringing it to the forefront for reflection. This project could help some of these frustrated individuals and through the spiritual disciplines, empower them toward a Christ-centered relationship that should give them spiritual liberation. There was also a television show called the Waltons. This show was a contrast and centered around a Caucasian family and how they struggled with issues of poverty, war, marriage, family and prejudice. Diff'rent Strokes was another trailblazer sitcom when rich white businessman, Phillip Drummond, adopted two African American brothers after their mother, his maid, died. The television show prompted their audience to learn about life lessons in a bi-racial family setting.

Changes began taking place in the 70's involving family life. There was a movement of open marriage and common law marriage. The open marriage lifestyle had its good points and bad points. Nena and George O'Neil wrote a book about open marriage and stated:

Young people experiment with group marriage, married couples sway partners for the evening, and movie stars frankly discuss their once secret liaisons in public interviews. Young women, increasingly dissatisfied with marital constrictions, refuse to marry at all. Some, as bachelor mothers, courageously choose to raise their young alone. In fact, you can now adopt children even if you've never been married. . .¹¹⁵

In an open marriage, there are usually no secrets involving other people, couples or lovers outside of the relationship. In distinction there is common law marriage. Although no longer a law, common law regarded people who lived together for five years and if they

¹¹⁵ Nena O'Neil and George O'Neil, *Open Marriage: A New Lifestyle For Couples* (New York, NY: M. Evans and Company, 1972), 16.

decided to go their separate ways, their household goods were divided between the two, no court or attorney fees or alimony.. Although open marriage and common law or co-habitation is out of the scope for this project, it does work for some individuals. In order for people to live within the biblical guidelines and establish a holy family, the necessity for a Christ-centered relationship could be essential and vital.

Goldscheider and Waite further elaborate on the family by discussing gender roles and responsibilities, they stated; “Family roles may become associated with the negative aspects of gender roles. Men worry that to marry, and embark on the development of a long-term close relationship and possibly parenthood, necessarily means assuming heavy financial burdens and responsibility. Women are also likely to fear that given the experience of their mothers and older sisters over the last few decades, marriage and parenthood will require them to assume the double burden of full responsibility for housework and child care even while supporting their families.”¹¹⁶ The roles of family can sometimes seem unconstructive or harmful. When it comes to financial stability, the couple has fears of not being fiscally sound. Instead of men taking care of women and the family, it now has turned into both partners working for the good of the family, together on one accord. Fears in these relationships are quite understandable, but should not be the reason for not marrying.

D’Vera Cohn published an article entitled “Love and Marriage” and disclosed, “Americans believe that love is the main foundation of marriage. Most who never have been married say they would like to be at some point in their lives. However, statistics show Americans aren’t rushing to the altar, and the U.S. marriage rate is at an all-time

¹¹⁶ Goldscheider and Waite, *New Families*, 60.

low—only 51% of adults were married in 2011, according to the U.S. Census Bureau statistics.”¹¹⁷ This project resonates that God, through Jesus Christ is the foundation for marriage. Love is important, but a relationship with Jesus is more important. An individual should learn to love like Jesus, be humble and kind like Jesus, become submissive like Jesus. There are many characteristics to love, but with Jesus as the foundation for the marriage, there is no way the couple can go wrong.

One of the most important problems facing some congregations is trying to reach young adults regarding covenantal love and mutuality. It is understood they are possibly experiencing quite a few issues and problems due to their decision-making. Edward P. & Anne Streaty Wimberly wrote a book entitled *Liberation and Human Wholeness: The Conversion Experiences Of Black People In Slavery & Freedom*, and declared, “The problem that faces any contemporary community of faith is the recovery of a meaningful faith. The basic problem is translating the central dynamic of God’s activity revealed in its tradition into meaningful symbols that communicate in the present.”¹¹⁸ There has to be a way to penetrate their technological world, and bring the Word of God to them in order for transformation from being reactive to being proactive, this project may be one of the needed steps.

The Church of England Report on Marriage and Divorce in “Section XVII: The Twentieth-Century Churches: Sexuality and Procreation,” states, “The Church,

¹¹⁷ D’Vera Cohn, “Love and Marriage”, *Pew Research: Social & Demographics Trends*, accessed January 7, 2014, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/02/13/love-and-marriage/>.

¹¹⁸ Edward P. Wimberly, and Anne Streaty Wimberly, *Liberation and Human Wholeness: The Conversion Experiences Of Black People In Slavery & Freedom* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1986), 113.

obedient to the Lord who founded her and gave to her the sacramental life, celebrates the divine plan of the loving and life-giving union of men and women in the sacrament of marriage. It is only in the marital relationship that the use of the sexual faculty can be morally good. . . .”¹¹⁹ The church’s posture on marriage has always been one of bringing the couple together honor God through the matrimony of procreation and the continuation of populating the earth and reconciliation unto God of the family.

Today, marriage does not seem to be the norm. Singles expert Eleanore S. Wells imparted, “By now, we all know about the rise in single people and that, for the first time in U.S. history, there are more single people than there are married people. . . . Right now, it’s pretty close in the U.S.: 49 percent married, 51 percent not married. But I wonder what would happen if this change continued, and being single became the norm the way married is not.”¹²⁰ The idea of “I can do bad all by myself” is a statement that permeates the underlying currents of having a partner, a singleness of purpose, a singleness of self. Holding out and not have sexual relations during high school, seemingly, is not the case today, there are so many young people having sexual relations early in life and it ends up making the person experience life instead of enjoying their youth.

A holistic approach to helping and assisting congregants seem to be rewarding. It is understood that when individuals are broken, they should be fixed or healed. Edward

¹¹⁹ “Church of England Report on Marriage and Divorce”, eds. Henry Bettenson, and Chris Maunder, *Documents of the Christian Church* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 425.

¹²⁰ Eleanore S. Wells, “When Married Is No Longer the Norm”, *The Huffington Post*, March 19, 2013, accessed March 26, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eleanore-s-wells/when-married-is-no-longer-norm_b_2864140.html.

Wimberly's informed his readers that, "The cure for shame, I insisted, is finding relationships with significant others in which we experience some semblance of nurture and care without having to turn ourselves inside out, in ways that only increase our share, in order to meet other people's expectations. I emphasized that the Spirit of God works on our behalf to help us view ourselves as worthwhile; God also tries to lead us toward the kinds of relationships that help us see ourselves as valuable."¹²¹ Holistic healing is a method, involving healing the whole person, totally. Many of the congregation must establish a relationship with God first to help them realize they are valuable, precious, unique, one of a kind, in God's eyes.

By forming a community, not literally living together, but being able to come together and share the invaluable transformational liberation that God can make possible in their life. The Wimberly's suggested in their book four steps crucial to developing Christians caring for one another, "As the person turned inward to attend to God's working, the role of the Christian community, or those who had encountered God and were not responding to that encounter through caring for others, was (1) to form sustaining relationships with the experience before, during and after the experience; (2) to attend to him or her by being a supportive presence; (3) to help the person interpret the practical implications of the conversion for everyday life; and (4) to create opportunities for the person to carry out the implications of the experience through participation in community."¹²² Everyone of these steps are necessary and vital to reaching out to the congregations. If Pastors would be willing to open up and share with them her personal

¹²¹ Edward P. Wimberly, *Moving from Shame to Self-Worth: Preaching & Pastoral Care* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 11.

¹²² Edward P. Wimberly and Anne Streaty Wimberly, *Human Wholeness*, 65.

journeys, tumultuous at times and victorious at times, this might alleviate the notion that Pastors are perfect. But the first step is God. This is why the Wimberly's books could be a great resource to use in the project and communication might be one essential key in the first step toward understanding how to be of service to congregants.

Married people believe love to be a main factor in marrying, yet their unmarried counterparts do not consider love a significant aspect. D'Vera Cohn offered the following marriage statistics, among married people, "93% say love is a very important reason to get married, 84% of unmarried people say so. Men and women are equally likely to say love is a very important reason to get married."¹²³ So it seems love is important when becoming betrothed. Love is important but a relationship with Jesus Christ is better and should be regarded as the first step in relationships. Regarding her opinion on love and marriage, Stephanie Coontz conveyed, "Married people are more interested in marrying someone they love in contrast with unmarried persons. But only rarely in history has love been seen as the main reason for getting married."¹²⁴ Cohn and Coontz are in agreement with love when it comes to married and unmarried persons. Again Cohn goes on to say, "...for those who have never wed, marriage remains a life goal. About six-in-ten (61%) men and women who have never married say they would like to get married, according to the 2010 Pew Research survey, Only 12% say they do not want to marry and 27% are not sure. Though they say they would like to wed, most Americans are not in a hurry to do so. [B]eing a good parent was seen as the most important thing by a larger share of adults (53%). When it comes to getting ahead in a career, being single wins out, 24% to

¹²³ Cohn, *Love and Marriage*, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/02/13/love-and-marriage/>.

¹²⁴ Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, A History :How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2005), 2-3.

14%.¹²⁵ There are single family members that want to get married, but their expectations are so high that no one could possibly meet them. Looking at young mothers and fathers, raising their children as single, without the partner, the pressures can be enormous. No one should have to raise a child on their own, it took two people to make the child, it should be two people caring for the child or children.

Joseph A. Buijs in his book, *Christian Marriage Today Growth or Breakdown?* suggests, “By now it is a virtual truism to claim that marriage is in a state of crisis.”¹²⁶ The church could empower adults in order to find out why marriage today is seemingly under assault. There appears to be a large amount of wickedness and ungodliness in families today which could be why marriage is in such a state of calamity. Some congregants are hesitant to being in a covenantal relationship, one of mutuality, even to the point of marriage. Feminist and Womanist thought has been voiced and heard.

Weisner-Hanks stated:

The political movement of the 1960’s also reinvigorated the feminist movement as women involved in civil rights and antiwar causes discovered that their most revolutionary male colleagues did not treat them as equals or consider their ideas or contributions as valuable as those of men. . . The gay liberation movement encouraged the study of homosexuality in the past and present and the development of gay and lesbian studies programs, and it also made both public and academic discussions of sexual matters more acceptable.¹²⁷

The presence of homosexual partners and marriages although more present in today’s society, is out of the scope for this project.

¹²⁵ Cohn, *Love and Marriage*, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/02/13/love-and-marriage/>.

¹²⁶ Joseph A. Buijs, *Christian Marriage Today Growth Or Breakdown?* (New York, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1985), 1.

¹²⁷ Merry Weisner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 2-4.

Pope John Paul II during his Roman Catholic Church papacy (1978 – 2005), wrote *On The Family: Familiaris Consortio* and conveyed, “The communion of love between God and people, a fundamental part of the revelation and faith experience of Israel, a meaningful expression in the marriage covenant which is established between a man and a woman. Their bond of love becomes the image and the symbol of the covenant which unites god and his people.”¹²⁸

Dr. Carolyn C. Ross wrote an article, “Overexposed and Under-Prepared: The Effects of Early Exposure to Sexual Content” in the journal *Psychology Today*. Dr. Ross says, “They grow up so fast, parents often lament. Today, children are being sexualized earlier and earlier, in part because they are exposed to sexual material in movies, television, music and other media earlier than ever. With widespread access to the Internet, curious teens may accidentally or intentionally be exposed to millions of pages of material that is uncensored, sexually explicit, often inaccurate and potentially harmful.”¹²⁹ Our youth today have somewhat been overexposed and under prepared for sexual relations. Women and men should be more conscientious when they become sexually active and more in tune with whom they choose to engage in sex with. Communication between parents and their children regarding sexual activity is key, a point that cannot be stressed enough. It is agreed that parents should take to become more active in their children’s lives. Some young people see sex as something more exciting than dealing with their ‘boring’ lives. So they partake. As parents, imparting to them the

¹²⁸ Pope John Paul II, *On The Family: Familiaris Consortio* (Washington, DC: Office of Publishing Services United States Catholic Conference, 1981), 10.

¹²⁹ Carolyn C. Ross, “Overexposed and Under-Prepared: The Effects of Early Exposure to Sexual Content”, *Psychology Today*, August 12, 2013, accessed May 12, 2014, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/real-healing/201208/overexposed-and-under-prepared-the-effects-early-exposure-sexual-content>.

pros and cons regarding sex in conveying that there is much more to it than what they are experiencing, seeing or viewing. A spiritual connection to Jesus is what the congregants need. Their first relationships should be with God through Christ Jesus by becoming more faithful, filled with a love that will last for eternity.

Choosing to be celibate until marriage, at one time was adhered to, seemingly not practiced very much today. The church should take more responsibility in not letting church youth delve deeper and deeper into non-Christian habits, such as, sessions on how to take responsibility and be accountable in a relationship. They need to make a spiritual connection with Jesus, become more trustworthy and devoted to God in their walk and talk. This could be done if the church would continue to advocate Christ-centered marriage in the attempt to take our youth back. Parents should become young adult role models instead of fake television characters.

Within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) denomination, marriages are performed by the Pastor, Co-Pastor, Associate or Assistant Pastors, ordained clergy. Prior to the marriage ceremony, there are pre-marriage counseling sessions with the couple. Included in the Chalice Worship Manual for Christian Church (DOC) ministers, after the pre-counseling sessions are completed, there is a prayer for the engaged couple.¹³⁰ There are two different wedding ceremonies, preference of ceremony depends on the couple. Christian Marriage I is a more formal ceremony and Christian Marriage II is informal.¹³¹

Parents as well as churches have to communicate to their young adults that marriage is not easy, but it can work, it is achievable. When the congregants allow God to

¹³⁰ Colbert S. Cartwright, and O. I. Cricket Harrison, *Chalice Worship* (St. Louis, MI: Chalice Press, 1997), 218.

¹³¹ Cartwright and Harrison, *Chalice Worship*, 34-42.

be the head of their life, then perhaps they will choose a Christian mate. If the person they meet is not Christian, they could be introduced to Christianity. God gave human beings the ability of decision making. God hungers for all humanity to be reconciled into the Kingdom of God, of being a holy family again. God is all about family. Congregants should get back to the basics, back to tradition, back to holiness, back to the holy state of matrimony.

THEOLOGICAL

Why Marriage Matters

Marriage matters because of its biblical foundation, God's blessings and favor. It is discussed here as a potential solution to the demise of the family from that which God intended. Personal and church experiences for Rev. Pamela at Light of the Community Christian Church, in the area of helping broken families involved in non-covenantal relationships; bring her to the place of investigating it further. Marriage matters because God instituted it in the Garden in Eden. It unified Adam and Eve as God intended. God did not want man to be alone (Gen. 2:18) and created for him a help meet in the form of a woman. After the two were joined, God's aim was for man and woman to leave their parents and become one (Gen. 2:24). The two merged as one organism and worked together in harmony.

Proverbs 18:22 clarifies that "a man who finds a wife finds a good thing and he obtains favor from the Lord." In Genesis 1:28, God blessed humankind and established a goal for them. As the righteous seed, Adam, Eve, Noah and his family were instructed to

multiply and replenish the earth to establish future generations of godly families.¹³²

Marriage brings God's blessings to the couple the way He originally planned. David Popenoe believed, "We should disavow the notion that 'mommies can make good daddies,' just as we should disavow the popular notion...that 'daddies can make good mommies.'... The two sexes are different to the core, and each is necessary—culturally and biologically—for the optimal development of a human being."¹³³ By denouncing the non-covenantal attitude and rejecting the notion that raising a child or children by one parent is sufficient, becoming Christ-centered and bringing God into the core of the relationship may be the unifying factor needed to rebuild and restore the righteous seed.

Theologian Henri Nouwen imparted, "One of the main tasks of theology is to find words that do not divide but unite, that do not create conflict but unity, that do not hurt but heal."¹³⁴ Rev. Pamela agrees with Nouwen that division, conflict and hurt are very real issues which could be a few of the dynamics producing brokenness within relationships and families. Howard Thurman appreciated the need of all human beings to recognize the value of their own experience. Thurman says, "Life is against all dualism, life is one...always, against all that fragments and shatters, and against all things that separate and divide within and without, life labors to meld together into a single

¹³² Gen. 1:28; 9:1, King James Version. The righteous seed are those who continue in the tradition of being in relationship with God. Future generations refer to the descendants of Adam and Eve and according to Genesis 9:1, Noah and his family who were also instructed by God to be fruitful and multiply and to replenish the earth, as well as their descendants who remain a part of God's righteous Kingdom. Godly families refers to those who keep God as their core focus.

¹³³ David Popenoe, *Life Without Father: Compelling New Evidence That Fatherhood and Marriage Are Indispensable for the Good of Children and Society* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1996), 36.

¹³⁴ Henri Nouwen, *BrainyQuote.com*, accessed January 31, 2014, <http://brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/theology.html>.

harmony.”¹³⁵ There is the possibility that due to social economics and injustices within communities, the focus for individuals may be on the things that keep them apart, yet finding the things that are familiar which could bring them together. When Christians cohabitate with those of other or no faith, the situation becomes volatile and adulterous, leading to ungodliness and sin, separating them from God. The key to this brokenness of families and non-covenantal relationships is God, through Jesus Christ. In order to win God’s favor, families should get back to the basics of marriage and being blessed and sanctified by God.

As the corruptions of the world have infiltrated families over time, and the brokenness of those families have been identified across the nations, it has become apparent that these same families have penetrated the walls of the church context. Through our evangelism efforts to reach families for God, these same broken relationships can be found within the worship environment. In order for the body of Christ to be effective it needs to be restorative in its efforts to bring families to God, and their salvation in Christ. Church leadership should be intentionally effective at re-establishing families as they enter the church. It is the church that could bring healing to the family by restoring and reestablishing them the way it was intended to be.

In order for this to take place there will need to be conversation between leadership and those incumbent members and families. These conversations will require much attention through the art of listening and hearing to identify inherent problems causing the breakdown of the family. It too, will require Christian education on the spiritual disciplines to bring about spiritual formation. In dealing with the subject of

¹³⁵ Howard Thurman, *The Search for Common Ground* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1986), x.

hearing as hospitality, Dr. Emma Justes said, we must do more than listen, we must learn to hear beyond the words of those we listen to.¹³⁶ Knowledge becomes a two-way learning technique, the Pastor and the congregant learn from one another through the art of hearing and listening. Once the ears are open to the congregant and vice versa, a reciprocal dialogue begins to unfold. Justes says, “Listening to people is a prelude to preaching. The preaching Pastor who knows the people, whom she or he brings the message of the sermon, knows how to address it to these particular people. Hearing the people is the way they are known; their struggles, pains, and needs are revealed in listening to them.”¹³⁷ In order to achieve the outcome of being Christ-centered toward marriage, the exchange of listening and hearing from both congregant and Pastor allow for each to identify with the problems that keep them from making a commitment to another individual. When individuals work separately, they usually do not view the big picture, they tend to look at fragments and dissect the relationship.

Through the utilization of Christian education on spiritual disciplines; prayer, meditation/reflection, Bible study and journaling, the Pastor could assist in providing healing and spiritual restoration to broken families. In becoming more efficient in aiding families in their inner transformation, we positively affect the surrounding communities. In looking for a solution to improper relationships, becoming Christ-centered can be a key element. Christ himself states that above all things we should love God and then our neighbors as ourselves.

¹³⁶ Emma J. Justes, *Hearing Beyond the Words: How to Become a Listening Pastor* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 2006).

¹³⁷ Justes, *Hearing Beyond the Words*, xv.

What better way to rebuild families than to share the love of God and neighbor through Christ Jesus. Maya Angelou stated, “Love recognizes no barriers. It jumps hurdles, leaps fences, penetrates walls to arrive at its destination full of hope.”¹³⁸ Scripture tells us that faith, hope and love abide, and the greatest of them all is love (I Cor 13:13). In order to bring wholeness and healing to relationships as God intended, we must attempt to reverse the process which has degraded marriage by returning the love of God through Christ as its core thread. The following verse taken from a traditional hymn, The Solid Rock, written by Edward Mote, expresses it greatly, “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness, I dare not trust that sweet refrain, but holy lean on Jesus name. On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand.”¹³⁹

Spiritual Formation

The focus on Marriage could be one of a person’s spiritual journey in which the church could take a lead role. This may allow the congregant to incorporate the disciplines in his or her life in order to become more Christ-centered. The church is the bridge between Christ and the community. Once the individual has immerse him/herself into the word of God and begins a regimen of prayer, worship, humility, meditation and reflection through journaling and serving others, then there is a possibility to open their heart to another individual to begin a relationship that is Christ-centered. Diane Leclerc

¹³⁸ Maya Angelou, *Brainy Quote.com*, accessed October 14, 2014, <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/m/mayaangelo389446.html#7ersKMXpAIw7usiD.99>.

¹³⁹ Edward Mote, “My Hope Is Built” *The New National Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville, TN: National Baptist Publishing Board, 2007), 223.

and Mark A. Maddix assist by providing the following definition, “[S]piritual formation then includes a focus on the inner transformation of the human person into the likeness of Jesus Christ. This transformation takes place when humans participate with God’s grace and not against it. Living in step with the Spirit in trust and obedience is the key. Spiritual formation is also a communal activity. Church matters.”¹⁴⁰

Nouwen, on the subject of spiritual formation and the discipline of prayer stated the following, “It’s about the *movements* from the mind to the heart through prayer in its many forms that reunite us with God and each other and our truest *selves*.”¹⁴¹ LeClerq, Maddix and Nouwen agree that spiritual formation utilizing the spiritual disciplines are necessary. To be formed spiritually through Bible study, prayer, meditation/reflection, and journaling, the transformation of the individual could become more in tune with the collective wholeness of God.

Pastoral leadership may offer spiritual nurture and support to congregants through instruction on spiritual disciplines utilizing counsel and guidance. Typically the church has been the hospital and filling station when individuals become tired and weary from living sin focused lives. In order for change to take place within relationships which lead toward Christ-centered marriage, the individual should obtain spiritual direction from church Pastoral and lay leadership. Having gained salvation through their acceptance of Christ and with their newly established relationships within the church, the eventual outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon these individuals will further help to spiritually form

¹⁴⁰ Diane Leclerc and Mark A. Maddix, *Spiritual Formation: A Wesleyan Paradigm* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2011), 16.

¹⁴¹ Henri J. M. Nouwen and Michael J. Christensen, *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishing, 2011), xvi.

them. Throughout this development and their understanding of the will of God for their relationships toward marriage, they may become empowered and capable of enduring or transcending the trials and tribulations of marriage. Marjorie J. Thompson gives testimony to spiritual direction in the Christian tradition;

We have noted that between the fourth and sixth centuries, Christians flocked to the deserts of Egypt and Arabia to consult on personal spiritual matters with the elder monks of the desert. These monks firmly established the deep-rooted tradition of ‘spiritual fathers and mothers’ in the church. They offered advice, words of wisdom, parables, personal examples of Christian life, and sometimes simple silence as means of direction. Through the centuries, spiritual direction has been provided by priests, monks, ministers, and elders in the church. Protestants have typically called it ‘Pastoral counsel’ or ‘spiritual consultation’ and have often given it in small groups or families rather than individually.¹⁴²

The importance of the Holy Spirit cannot be left out of the growth, development and nurturing process of those individuals and families coming into the church. Michael W. Foss enlightens how the Holy Spirit descends upon the congregant, [T]he power of the Holy Spirit can help us find our way. Our skepticism can be turned to joy, our apathy to spiritual energy, and our inability to meet the special hunger in others can be changed into spiritual daring and skill.¹⁴³ Even in the early centuries, individuals sought out advice from spiritual leaders in order to ensure that the direction in which they were going was the correct path. The spiritual journey could begin when the individual comes to a cross-road in their life in choosing which direction to go or what path to take. Along that journey their spiritual formation becomes the result of much nurturing and is

¹⁴² Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 109.

¹⁴³ Michael W. Foss, *Real Faith for Real Life: Living the Six Marks of Discipleship* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 4.

expressed in their successful endurance of relational trials and tribulations throughout their godly living and marriages. The Holy Spirit helps to continue the nurturing process even to the point of their outward expression of what they've learned along the way, bringing them peace in times of turmoil.

It is very important that the one going through the transformation realizes the need for their own personal involvement in their spiritual growth and development. Self and inward reflection becomes an important endeavor toward finding God and freeing one's own heart to love. Outward reflection through Bible Study pertaining to the teachings of Christ and the light of God, also help to empower the seeker. Learning to love God and Christ becomes the foundation for any relationship which should lead to marriage. In continuing this conversation, Nouwen offers additional insight with the following statement; "Spiritual formation requires taking an inward journey to the heart. Although this journey takes place in community and leads to service, the first task is to look within, reflect on our daily life, and seek God and God's activity right there."¹⁴⁴ This inward journey into one's heart is the place where God resides and where once spiritually formed through the spiritual disciplines, the heart is equipped and willing to serve others in moving toward a Christ-centered marriage.

¹⁴⁴ Nouwen and Christensen, *Spiritual Formation*, xix.

Flora Slosson Wuellner, in addressing the need for study said;

Even more startling and empowered is Jesus, when we read the Gospels as if we had never read them before. Again we breathe another air and see love as a passionate empowered inner flame. It is *not* the stance of victimhood. It is not the powerlessness that submits to invasion. Its foundation is not that of unawareness and self-abnegation. Rather, I see love's response flowing out of radiant strength; love's response flowing out of freedom, not bondage.¹⁴⁵

Through Bible study, the Word of God can allow an individual to be liberated by Scripture thereby releasing and giving love to others without feeling uninhibited. Spiritual maturity through the liberation of releasing or letting go of past hurts and brokenness, could allow the individual to freely invite another person into their life without hesitancy. Spiritual disciplines may offer clarification into why some congregants have broken homes, broken lives and broken promises.

Christian Education

Christian education empowers individuals to grow into a level of spiritual maturity as they approach the disciplines necessary for spiritual formation through the process of nurturing and training. It helps to develop their abilities to utilize the spiritual gifts given to them by God through Christ. Christian education through the spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible Study, meditation/reflection and journaling, may equip congregants to engage others and learn to love and give of him/herself in order to win others to God through Jesus Christ. Jesus left the world with a challenge to go make disciples, baptizing and teaching them all that was commanded by him (Mat 28:19-20). The Project Administrator gained an invaluable foundation in Christian pedagogy within

¹⁴⁵ Flora Slosson Wuellner, *Release: Healing from Wounds of Family, Church, and Community* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 1996), 16.

her church because of effective Pastoral leadership and a caring congregation. Nelson Mandela is quoted as saying, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”¹⁴⁶ In that same respect, Christian education could be more powerful than secular education, because it deals with the spiritual which has power over the flesh. Therefore, by enhancing one’s educational status within a spiritual environment, it helps to strengthen the individual spiritually as well as educationally; it is a key component which could alter the direction or path one takes. Barbara Brown Zikmund in *Theology and Identity: Traditions, Movements, and Polity in the United Church of Christ* suggest that, “Empowerment views of ministry focus upon the clergy as intellectual leaders, preaching and teaching for the up-building of the church.”¹⁴⁷ In order for those leaders to bring transformation for those individuals within the church, their spiritual gifts will have to be utilized in a manner that will allow spiritual formation to take place. Using their gifts in providing Christian education could potentially accomplish that end. Jesus through the power of God gives spiritual gifts to people in the form of apostles, prophets, Pastors and teachers in order to equip congregations for ministry (Ephesians 4:11-13); counseling too, could be considered a spiritual gift.

Norma Cook Everist in *The Church As Learning Community: A Comprehensive Guide to Christian Education* asserts, “Within the faith community people learn from one another by being models and mentors. . . They can learn from one another because a

¹⁴⁶ Nelson Mandela, Brainy Quotes, accessed October 10, 2014, http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/topics/topic_education.html.

¹⁴⁷ Barbara Brown Zikmund, *Theology and Identity: Traditions, Movements, and Polity in the United Church of Christ*, eds. Daniel L. Johnson and Charles Hambrick-Stowe (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1990), 84.

brother or sister in Christ has already walked that way before.”¹⁴⁸ In order to arrive at a mindset for Christ-centered marriage, the theology of empowering the congregants through Christian education is a crucial step for Pastors and leaders of the church in the process of spiritual formation.

Counseling may be considered one element of spiritual formation that helps the individual through the process of one-on-one interaction with a more mature Christian. According to Duane R. Bidwell, “Couples who receive appropriate, empowering guidance from someone who cares (both about the partnership and about the individuals involved) can make significant progress toward resolving their own problems and maintaining a good-enough relationship despite tough times.”¹⁴⁹ Although not a direct form of training under the subject of Christian education, it does provide spiritual insights that help to inform individuals, couples and families. It is important to mention in this area because of the results it provides; being educational insights, self-reflection and spiritual healing.

Margaret Zipse Kornfeld discussed the need for Community Care and Counseling when having stated:

¹⁴⁸ Norma C. Everist, *The Church As Learning Community: A Comprehensive Guide to Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 108.

¹⁴⁹ Duane R. Bidwell, *Empowering Couples: A Narrative Approach to Spiritual Care* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 2.

Much of the work of counselors is to support members as they move into the beginning of each phase in the family life cycle. Through youth groups, family education, and community care and counseling, *adolescents* are helped to become independent. Parents are helped to 'let go' so that their children may leave home, learn skills for self-support, and develop intimate relationships. Clergy are there for them when they are ready to marry. They give premarital care, perform the weddings, and counsel families so that *new families* can be created.¹⁵⁰

Christian education surrounding Christ-centered relationships and marriage could potentially be one of the factors that aid in the underrepresentation of holy families. Instilling godly (biblical) values in congregants might be the saving and redeeming grace of God that may possibly turn them away from ungodly relationships toward a Christ-centered one. Pastoral and lay leaders should be ready and willing to instruct individuals and couples on what could be happening in their lives through the arts of teaching and/or counseling.

Pastor Jackie Nowak at Southminster Presbyterian Church in Dayton, Ohio has a ministry entitled the Blessing Center. The center practices nurture, prayer and worship, living Sabbath, holy listening, hospitality, community and blessing. Children and others are assisted in identifying, maintaining and deepening their relationship with God and the world.¹⁵¹ This center invites children, six to twelve, and adults to come experience and learn spiritual formation through the abovementioned disciplines in order to expand their relationship with God and by being able to serve others. Along with this ministry is another one entitled Pockets Ministry. The Upper Room Ministry is a global ministry designed to also enhance children and their relationship with God. This ministry offers

¹⁵⁰ Margaret Z. Kornfeld, *Cultivating Wholeness: A Guide to Care and Counseling in Faith Communities* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2004), 148.

¹⁵¹ Southminster Presbyterian Church, The Blessing Center, Jackie Nowak, accessed November 11, 2014, <http://www.blessingcenter.org/about%20us.htm/>.

magazines for children six through twelve, at the request of parents and grandparents, in order for them to learn to pray and see their faith in their everyday life.¹⁵² This type of Christian education can bring out more well-equipped young adults when they reach the point of reaching out to form a relationship with another individual. It also teaches them about community and how God calls us to love all people. If these children learn about God at an early age, the child might grow into a better Christian who is Christ-centered. Perhaps they will have been transformed and become better equipped and mature in the decisions they make and experiences they could encounter.

Transformation is the revolutionary conversion of the individual in becoming spiritually formed. Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer wrote about Christian education and how it impacts the transformation of the church;

We treasure the concept of ‘transformation’ because radical change is the heart of the Christian message and because the power of the gospel changes everything—lives, churches, and communities. When God transform lives, He doesn’t just build temples of the Holy Spirit in individuals, He builds His church by adding more lives to the body. The church is God’s tool and instrument for His kingdom agenda.¹⁵³

Again by getting to the heart, the individual has been opened to the love of God through Jesus Christ. In order for Christian education to become effective, the congregant’s heart should change from being about self, into wanting to serve others. It has been the researcher’s experience that this flowering happens after the individual has relinquished the reins of their own understanding and allows God to come into their heart and spiritual

¹⁵² The Upper Room, Pockets Ministry, accessed November 10, 2014, <http://www.upperroom.org/about/writer-guidelines/pockets>.

¹⁵³ Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer, *Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group and LifeWay Research, 2010), 1.

formation begins to transform them. It must be remembered, God is all about relational values, family, and unity.

Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote an article for the Morehouse College ‘The Maroon Tiger’ paper in 1947. The article title was, “The Purpose of Education”. In this article Dr. King wrote, “Education must enable a man to become more efficient, to achieve with increasing facility the legitimate goals of his life. Education must also train one for quick, resolute and effective thinking. We are prone to let our mental life become invaded by legions of half truths, prejudices and propaganda.”¹⁵⁴ King believed in the reciprocal process of teaching and learning. When wisdom is imparted to the student, the student therefore may become as wise as the teacher. The congregant must be aware of impure thinking and unrighteous acts and should rise above the false ideology of those that might want to pull them from the godly path and into sin.

Maxie Dunnam wrote a few Christian education workbooks centered around spiritual values. *The Workbook on Spiritual Disciplines* incorporates a six-week course designed to teach students about spiritual disciplines and how to incorporate them into their lives. The course is centered around the disciplines of Scripture, prayer, reflection, submission and service, generosity) also included are reflecting and recording.¹⁵⁵ These workbooks are a great resource tool for churches to utilize in order to assist the congregants in their quest for a closer relationship with God in order to become spiritually formed and better equipped to sustain a Christ-centered relationship toward marriage.

¹⁵⁴ Martin Luther King, Jr., “*The Purpose of Education*,” Morehouse College Student Paper, The Maroon Tiger, 1947, <http://www.drmartinlutherkingjr.com/thepurposeofeducation.htm>.

¹⁵⁵ Maxie Dunnam, *The Workbook on Spiritual Disciplines* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 1984), 10.

Beverly Burton and Drew A. Dyson created a workbook resource entitled, *Soul Tending: Life Forming Practices for Older Youth and Young Adults*. Burton and Dyson's course involves the spiritual disciplines of discernment, honoring the body, devotional reading, Lectio Divina, Chastity, Fasting, Bible Study, Forgiveness, giving thanks and praise. They state, "Obviously, we can't just 'will' ourselves into imitating Christ, although most of us have tried. Jesus' self-giving love goes against every self-serving human instinct we have. Only God's gift of grace makes the Christian life possible."¹⁵⁶ This educational resource takes one on a journey of self-enlightenment with the possibility of moving to the next level in Jesus Christ. The spiritual disciplines play a major role in becoming Christ-centered.

Christian education is key toward spiritual growth and discipleship. The church could bridge the congregant by using the components of spiritual disciplines as the basis for true growth and advancement toward a Christ-centered relationship. Until the individual becomes Christ-centered, there could be a potential for the continuance of the perpetuation of sin focused living. One of the greatest mandates for Christian education is the great commission that Jesus left for us, to go and make disciples teaching them what Jesus commanded of us (Mat 28:19-20). Teaching is one of those directives in which Pastors may utilize in order to reach young adults and set them on a journey that could lead toward a Christ-centered marriage.

¹⁵⁶ Beverly Burton and Drew A. Dyson, *Soul Tending: Life Forming Practices for Older Youth and Young Adults* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 10.

Christ-Centered Marriage

Albert Einstein gave a definition of insanity as, doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result.¹⁵⁷ Human beings continue to live sin focused lives, yet expect a different outcome from what they believe should happen. For example, in dealing with single parent homes outside and inside of the church experience has shown that marriage is a desired result, yet for many it is not obtained due to the practice of fornication and the lack of commitment. Families are created but do not represent the traditional structure as intended by God according to Scripture. Ephesians 5:22-33 informs its readers that wives should subject to their husbands and that the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is to the church. This text's central focus is the Christian home and how it solidifies holy (godly) families. Families have gone in all types of directions and have surpassed God's focus on man, woman and child/children. Helping, caring, loving, and uplifting each other should be the focal point for the couple and God through Jesus Christ must be at the heart of the couple. Transformation within the individual could potentially come from the spiritual disciplines after incorporating them into his/her life. Spiritual maturity, once defined and identified within the couple could bring about a respect for oneself and others by becoming more concerned in restoring blessed families to the state in which God intended.

Wayne A. Meeks stated, "On the whole, though, the sexual purity for which the Pauline Christians strive in an impure world is defined mostly in terms of values that are widely affirmed by the larger society. . . It is clear Paul's preference is that believers marry 'in the Lord,' that they marry other believers. Very likely this expectation was

¹⁵⁷ Albert Einstein, BrainyQuote.com, Accessed October 10, 2014.
<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/a/alberteins133991.html>.

generally known among the churches of his circle, for this would help to explain why the issue of continuing or severing marriages between Christian and non-Christian spouses was raised in Corinth. The phrase ‘a sister as wife’ in 1 Cor. 9:5 presupposes the norm.”¹⁵⁸ Men were not permitted to marry foreign women, because they were of a different faith. When Christians cohabitate with those of other faiths, the situation becomes volatile and adulterous leading to ungodliness and sin, separating them from God.

David G. Hunter points out early church influence and the need for change in dealing with the subject of marriage when he shares that;

Early Christian thought on marriage, sexuality, and procreation has had an enormous influence on the subsequent development of Christian ethics and, indeed, on the marital ethos of the Western world more generally... Changing circumstances required new responses in every aspect of Christian life, and marriage was no exception.¹⁵⁹

How the early church dealt with marriage has had a colossal impact on marriage and the Western world. The sacrament of the theology of marriage is all about the welfare and protection of the family. The following stats provide confirmation to the drastic differences between the ratio of births to marriages in a given year.

The U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, Vital Statistics of the United States and the National Vital Statistics Reports show that in 2007 there were 4,316 births across the United States and 2,205 marriages.¹⁶⁰ Staggering numerical differences show that

¹⁵⁸ Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 100-101.

¹⁵⁹ David G. Hunter, *Marriage in the Early Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 1.

¹⁶⁰ U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, Vital Statistics of the United States, and National Vital Statistics Reports, accessed March 14, 2014, <http://www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/11statab/vitstat.pdf>.

trends for marriage are slightly less than half of births. These numbers tell the story of how some people today are having children born out of wedlock with no intention of marrying. Congregants seem to be taking the diversity explanation of what a family is and apparently disregarding what God intended the family to be.

Marriages are seemingly less common, yet the population growth is not dwindling. Julie Hanlon Rubio gives account of family and how different they look today. She asked her readers to visualize how families look, such as, a middle-class mom and dad picnicking with their two children or a large family that has come together to celebrate a holiday. She disclosed, “. . . [M]any Americans visualize some version of the nuclear family (mom, dad, and kids) or its extended-family incarnation and see these models as normal or at least desirable. Yet most of us know many families that do not look like this. Because of our diverse experiences of family life, we have begun to visualize different family models.”¹⁶¹ Based on experience, many of these families do not include serious commitment or marriage. They are often times abusive, lack love, support, and lack economic resources. Many of them do not have Christ at the center, as the core of their relationships and do not follow the format which God intended. Rubio discusses how the media provides images of some of these diverse families, such as; Ms. Doubtfire, Mr. Mom, The Brady Bunch (a blended family), even Barney, who imparts that families are ‘different’.¹⁶² As time passes, families become more diverse and the media continues to perpetuate non-traditional relationships and families. In today’s society, individuals or couples in the Lesbian-Bi/Sexual-Gay-Transgender communities

¹⁶¹ Julie Hanlon Rubio, *A Christian Theology of Marriage and Family* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2003), 3.

¹⁶² Rubio, *A Christian Theology*, 3-4.

are seeking family status by wanting to legally marry, obtain benefits, adopt or birth children as one form of diversifying the family. The diversity of families also include, grandparents raising their grandchildren, single parent homes, and the act of cohabitation without marriage. Again, based on experience, families without Christ at the center and God as their focus, in many cases, are unable to endure the trials and tribulations they incur causing the demise of the family.

Marriage was a sacred and divine act of bringing a male and female together in order to procreate. Marriage was considered a sacrament, a sacred act, ordained by God. God's original plan was to establish holy families and populate the earth with a righteous seed. J. D. Davis defines marriage as, "[A] divine institution, constituted at the beginning before the origin of human society. The Creator made man male and female, and ordained marriage as the indispensable condition of the continuance of the race (Gen.i. 27, 28)."¹⁶³ Yet Neil T. Anderson and Charles Mylander, in *The Christ Centered Marriage: Discovering and Enjoying Your Freedom in Christ Together*, define a Christ-centered marriage as, "A Christian marriage is a spiritual union with God that is intended to be a visible expression of the relationship that God has with the [c]hurch, which is the Bride of Christ. . .To maintain a Christian marriage we have to become one in Christ"¹⁶⁴ In order to create a Christ-centered marriage, an individual should have an established relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

¹⁶³ John D. Davis, *A Dictionary of the Bible* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1924), 476.

¹⁶⁴ Neil T. Anderson and Charles Mylander, *The Christ Centered Marriage: Discovering and Enjoying Your Freedom in Christ Together* (Ventura, CA: Regal, A Division of Gospel Light, 1984), 14, 16.

The godly focus that is necessary for the survival of any relationship requires Christ to be at the center of it. The following authors support this position in the following quotes. John C. Cavadini imparts, “Nevertheless, the canonical Gospels do not disparage marriage, but rather defend it as established by God and, if anything, argue that it should be restored to the pristine purity it had when it came forth from the hand of the Creator.”¹⁶⁵ When it comes to being a part of a pristine purity, Cavadini seems to convey that God established marriage between a male and female and in order for it to be Christ-centered, the couple could have an advantage of being able to cope and implement the spiritual disciplines, such as prayer, Bible study, meditation and contemplation, when faced with an issue.

William A. Spurrier communicates “In religious language, Christianity says that there is an image of God in each person, a spirit or soul which seeks the Creator—God. Or, as St. Augustine put it, ‘That soul is restless until it finds rest in God’ (Book 1, Confessions).”¹⁶⁶ God is placed within the conversation whenever the word marriage is spoken, God is in the midst of it. Cavadini and Spurrier agree that this journey of marriage is all about God and the holy family, the righteous seed.

Marriage must be Christ-centered, the relationship must be based on Christ and have the foundation of godly/biblical values bestowed within the confines of the relationship. Being united in marriage is similar to being united with Christ. David H.

¹⁶⁵ John A. Cavadini, “The Sacramentality of the Marriage in the Fathers”, *Pro Ecclesis* 17 no 4, Fall 2008, accessed February 24, 2014, <http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/resultsadvanced?sid=bde7f605-a009-4a5d-b7a8-a8aaac6be6c7%40sessionmgr4003&vid=6&hid=4101&bquery=augustine+AND+marriage&bdata=JmRiPXJmaCZjbGkwPUZUJmNsdjA9WSZjbGkxPUxBMTEmY2x2MT1FbmdsaXNoJnR5cGU9MSZzaXRIPWVob3N0LWxpdmU%3d>.

¹⁶⁶ William A. Spurrier, *Power For Action: An Introduction to Christian Ethics* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1948), 28.

Clark and Robert V. Rakestraw communicate, “In Genesis 1, God told the first couple to ‘be fruitful’ and to ‘fill the earth and subdue it’ (v.28) . . . John Calvin emphasized this unitive understanding of marriage. Genesis 2 lifts out and amplifies a segment of Genesis 1 by focusing on one couple and God’s purpose for them.”¹⁶⁷ When the couple has a love for Christ, their conviction of being a holy family will be the driving force that allows the union to stay the course, to weather the storm. Their hope is in Christ and with that hope, problems and issues that arise, do not seem to be so insurmountable. There is a confidence, an assurance that God through Jesus Christ is the foundation and whatever situation may come, the marriage will prevail.

The spiritually formed individual understands their destiny is to be united and joined with someone of a like-mind, a Christ-centered mind. Some congregants have defiled their homes by allowing themselves to be partners with a unholy partner, a non-believer. One can be misled by an ungodly partner, which is the basis for this Christ-centered marriage model. Anderson and Mylander convey, “Adam needed someone who was his equal in creation: someone who was spiritually alive and created in the image of God—someone like himself.”¹⁶⁸

Garry Friesen in *Decision Making and the Will of God: A Biblical Alternative to the Traditional View* affirmed, “And yet when push comes to shove, a remarkable number of Christians disregard the prohibition and marry unbelievers. After falling in love with non-Christians, they find supposed loopholes in the biblical statements, rationalize that in their situation the rules do not apply, and/or blatantly disobey the

¹⁶⁷ David H. Clark and Robert V. Rakestraw, *Readings in Christian Ethics: Issues and Applications Volume 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 142.

¹⁶⁸ Anderson and Mylander, *The Christ Centered Marriage*. 23.

revealed will of God.”¹⁶⁹ According to the above authors, it can be inferred that being equally yoked, and truthful and obedient to God, could help to strengthen any relationship and marriage as a result of being Christ-centered.

Throughout the centuries, the traditional view of marriage began to change in ways that perverted the institution of marriage the way God intended it. Some of the reasons are provided by the following authors, and help to show a slow progression of the demise of the family into a different view of what relationships mean. Sexuality became of greater importance than being married. John B. Cobb, Jr. wrote *Postmodernism and Public Policy: Reframing Religion, Culture, Education, Sexuality Class, Race, Politics, and the Economy*. Cobb’s chapter on Gender and Sexuality was:

In the nineteenth century, after the industrial revolution, the household ceased to be an economic producer. Men went off to work. Many poor women did so also. But the wives of the wealthy were kept at home and provided with servants to do the housework. Their role was to be ‘angels of the household,’ supporting community life and transmitting cultural values to the children. Above all, they were to provide comfort and support to their husbands. They were viewed as more moral and spiritual than men. Instead of being identified with natural sexuality as in the past, they were supposed to be above such things. Men looked to other women to satisfy their grosser sexual desires.¹⁷⁰

Cobb’s theology on feminism dealt with injustices and inequalities women faced. This type of sexism is comparable to keeping a woman barefoot and pregnant. Women were demeaned and looked at as cattle.

¹⁶⁹ Garry Friesen and J. Robin Maxson, *Decision Making and the Will of God: A Biblical Alternative to the Traditional View* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, Inc.: Family Christian Press, 1980), 301-302.

¹⁷⁰ John B. Cobb, Jr., *Postmodernism and Public Policy: Reframing Religion, Culture, Education, Sexuality, Class, Race, Politics, and the Economy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), 82-83.

David H. Clark and Robert V. Rakestraw in their *Readings in Christian Ethics:*

Issues and Applications Volume 2 state:

Unfortunately, our curiosity and interest concerning sexuality is not always guided and nurtured in a wholesome way. Throughout childhood and adolescence, parents and guardians teach their children quite comfortably and naturally about trees, animals, electricity, cooking, and many other aspects of life in the world. They usually do not, however, teach about sexual matters with similar ease. As a result, many of us grow into adulthood with partial and distorted views of God's pattern of sexuality for the human race. The church has not been particularly helpful in this regard. While we are frequently reminded of what we are not to do, we are seldom shown the positive biblical teaching about human sexuality.¹⁷¹

Christian Theology centered around where the family and church has fallen down in the area of spiritual formation through Christian education. It speaks volumes on how the ball has been dropped on teaching godly values and the biblical guidelines needed to have a Christ-centered relationship or marriage.

David G. Myers and Letha Dawson Scarzoni wrote a book entitled, *What God Has Joined Together: The Christian Case For Gay Marriage*. They imparted, "Massive evidence reveals that children, adults and communities thrive where marriage abounds. Without insensitivity to the four in ten American adults who are unmarried, we need to step back and ask how we might create a more marriage-supporting social ecology—and, with it, happier and healthier people and flourishing neighborhoods."¹⁷² They agree that marriage is a necessity and communities should support all types of marriages, and when communities are supported, they can reach out and pass the light of love in Jesus Christ.

¹⁷¹ Clark, and Rakestraw, *Readings in Christian Ethics*. 139.

¹⁷² David R. Myers and Letha Dawson Scarzoni, *What God Has Joined Together: The Christian Case For Gay Marriage* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2005), 4.

It is interesting to note, that David and Letha are on opposite sides when it comes to marriage, David advocates for traditional marriage and Letha is a supporter for gay marriage rights. Although they stand on opposite sides of the marriage debate, they have been married for over forty-one years and although are activists for opposing sides, they are united in God through Christ Jesus and are rooted in each other.

Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore wrote about the marriage debate as,

Does feminist or same-sex marriage really or foreshadow the end of civilization? Radical women and flamboyant homosexuals are easy (and ancient) targets, but neither undermines heterosexual instability, emotional dysfunction, unfair distribution of domestic labor, widespread divorce, interreligious differences and intercultural conflict. To portray same-sex and heterosexual commitment as mutually exclusively seems more a tactic of fear than one of love and grace.¹⁷³

When looking into feminism and same-sex marriage, though outside of the scope for his project, it is worth mentioning that individuals have the right to choose what is best for their life. For this project, is the intent to teach congregants how Christian education on biblical values could lead to a Christ-centered relationship towards marriage the way God intended in the Garden of Eden.

In contrast, Alice Walker ignited the womanist theory ideology. Walker defines the womanist theory as, “A black feminist or feminist of color...”¹⁷⁴ Although feminist recognized all women, feminist’s could not speak for women of color due to the differences in their backgrounds and experience in the world. Walker grew up in the

¹⁷³ Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, “Marriage Debate”, *Christian Century*, September 23, 2008, accessed, January 31, 2014, discoverarchive.vanderbilt.edu/bitstream/handle/1803/2652/Miller-McLemoreMarriageDebate125.19_2008.pdf?sequence=1.

¹⁷⁴ Alice Walker, *In Search Of Our Mothers’ Gardens-Womanist Prose* (Washington, PA: Harvest Book Company, 1983), ix.

South and dealt with racism and prejudice. She had knowledge and encounters of being unequal that only other sisters of color could understand. Both feminist and womanist theologies articulate their ideology, both are out of the scope for this project, but deserved honorable mention.

Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green, and Marianne Meye Thompson's book, *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology* express, "Paul's basic advice is that if celibacy is not possible for an individual, marriage is perfectly acceptable. What is not acceptable is any kind of sexual contact outside of the bonds of marriage of a man and a woman."¹⁷⁵ Sex outside of marriage can be full of complexities and conflicts for which the couple is not ready for. Sex comes easy, but its results can be more than what was expected from the couple.

Evangelical theologian Richard Foster challenges sexual ethics for singles in this way, "But what about those that are not married? It is one thing to champion the marriage union and its value in developing a context of trust for sexual bonding. It is another matter to talk about sexual desire and sexual release for those who are not married, who see no immediate prospect for marriage, and who do not believe they have the gift of **celibacy**. Since the number of singles in our society continues to rise, this is a pressing issue."¹⁷⁶ Foster's dispute regarding being single and the individual perceives no likelihood of being married, as Paul stated, it is better to marry than to burn. If one the unmarried congregants are introduced to a young man who seems interested in her, yet all

¹⁷⁵ Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green and Marianne Meye Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 341.

¹⁷⁶ Clark, and Rakestraw, *Readings in Christian Ethics*. 141.

the while, his interest is in having sex with her, if not for her spiritual formation through Christian education, she could succumb and marry this individual and the marriage end in travesty.

Clark, Johnson and Sloat express, “Society in the past has held marriage and the family in high esteem. . . . The common denominator for the changes in marriage values appears to be a shift in focus from commitment of partners in marriage—to a concern for personal rights.”¹⁷⁷ This type of thinking could bring about the ‘me’ syndrome which sends a viewpoint of non-commitment and a non-covenantal attitude which seems to be a dominant characteristic in relationships today.

Clark and Rakestraw again provide insight on theologian and ethicist Stanley Grenz by emphasizing, “. . . Grenz provides a somewhat different slant on the question of the purpose of human sexuality. . . . Grenz thus sees human sexuality as given by God to propel every person toward vibrant beneficial relationships with others and ultimately toward God himself.”¹⁷⁸ Friesen again states,

From a biblical perspective, the goal of the Christian is to establish a godly marriage that maximizes the potentials of God’s purposes. That being the case, the Christian man or woman should be looking for a counterpart who is qualified and committed to fulfilling that goal. Who fits that description? In the most general terms, it is the most spiritually mature person who is willing to be joined in marriage. In short, when a Christian is thinking through the qualities he or she is seeking in a spouse, moral and spiritual characteristics should head the list.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Robert E. Clark, Lin Johnson and Allyn K. Sloat. *Christian Education: Foundations for the Future* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1991), 556.

¹⁷⁸ Clark, Johnson and Sloat, *Christian Education*, 143.

¹⁷⁹ Friesen, *Decision Making and the Will of God*, 304-305.

When Christians begin moving toward marriage, Christ must be the center and the foundation of the union. Julie Hanlon Rubio wrote an article “Notes on Moral Theology, Family Ethics: Beyond Sex and Controversy” in the *Theological Studies Journal* assert, “Some theologians worry, however, that excessive toleration of cohabitation will exacerbate an already diminishing understanding of the social and ecclesial aspects of marriage.”¹⁸⁰ Cohabitation is a choice that most unmarried couples take. Rubio suggests that children born into cohabiting situations since forty percent of children in the United States spend more time in cohabiting unions than in single parent homes.¹⁸¹ There are no guarantees with any couple, but it is seemingly more likely for the couple to have a stronger foundation than those that have no spiritual base.

William L. Kynes in *The Marriage Debate: A Public Theology of Marriage* states;

To live within God’s design, the Christian must be empowered by the indwelling Spirit (2 Cor 3:3, 18). Consequently, Paul’s explicit instructions about the character of the marriage relationships (Eph 5:22-31) are preceded by the charge to be ‘filled with the Spirit’ (5:18) Believers are called to ‘put on the new person’ conformed to the image of Christ, restoring the image of God (Gal. 5:16-26; Col 3:3-13, esp. v. 10). Only the Spirit’s power can give hope that the marriage relationship can be restored to its original glory.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Rubio, Julie Hanlon, “Family Ethics: Beyond Sex and Controversy”, *Theological Studies*, 74, no. 1, March, 2013, p 138-161. EBSCOhost.com, accessed March 13, 2014, <http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=6&sid=6770e812-7980-4731-a314-8e02337c04b6%40sessionmgr111&hid=123&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZW9vc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=rhf&AN=ATLA0001931985>.

¹⁸¹ Rubio, “Family Ethics”, 160.

¹⁸² William L. Kynes, “The Marriage Debate: A Public Theology of Marriage”, *Trinity Journal*, 28.2, Fall 2007.

The empowerment of godly values taught to congregants for spiritual formation should transmit the proper actions and conduct for Christ-centered marriage. Finally, Clark and Rakestraw asserts;

But the intended pattern is clear, and the challenge of Paul to those who are married is to live out the pattern, loving each other, giving to each other, and holding together even when tempted to pull apart. It is important in the modern world, where there is so much confusion and so many anti-Christian pressures, that we understand and teach the Christian view of sex and marriage, not just to those who are married, but to those who will marry. We need to show people that Christian ‘narrowness’ is not negative, but liberatingly positive, and that Paul got it right!¹⁸³

It is the Pastors that must teach and inform their congregants in moving toward Christ-centered marriage and Christ-centered relationships. Clark, Johnson and Sloat continue, “In the midst of our selfishness and instability, the Word of God provides the only reliable mooring for the drifting craft of marriage. The loving and sovereign God has given marriage to mankind as a gift, and with it a revelation of what true marriage looks like. . . Only as we understand and observe biblical criteria and goals in marriage will that most sacred relationship be all it was meant to be.”¹⁸⁴ In order to help bridge others in growing closer to God, Christian education could be a vehicle to spiritually form congregants and act as a bridge or passage between the church and the world.

¹⁸³ Clark and Rakestraw., *Readings in Christian Ethics*, 148.

¹⁸⁴ Clark, Johnson, and Sloat, *Christian Education*. 557.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

Hypothesis

At Light of the Community Christian Church the problem of broken relationships leading to unwed parents is being examined. Utilizing the spiritual disciplines of Bible study, reflection through journaling, prayer, and meditation may be a key to living lives that are enriched through spiritual formation. Such a personal and congregational journey may empower them toward Christ-centered relationships. The Bible clearly states in Proverbs 18:22 (New Revised Standard Version), “when a man finds a wife, he finds a good thing.” This model may benefit other churches which experience similar or like situations. If the spiritual formation of some congregants could put back stability and constancy into their relationships, then there could be a positive impact on families. The intention is to spiritually form congregants through the empowerment of the spiritual disciplines. The results will measure change in attitudes toward Christ-centered relationships and marriage, biblical comprehension and understanding, and spiritual formation. If through this model there could be a shift in attitudinal outlook could occur, then other churches could offer similar training.

Intervention (Description of Ministry Project)

The project model examined the problem of broken relationships and unwed parents at Light of the Community Christian Church. The formation training on the spiritual disciplines offered a variety of experiences for the participants. Ten participants were selected to share in this project and were excited about contributing to this much needed training. Participants were chosen if they were single, had children, living as a single parent. It was not a pre-requisite that they had to be single, there were some divorced participants who had been without a partner between three and fifteen years. There was a pre-gathering meeting including the Contextual Associates in order to work out details of meeting times, and length of training sessions. The Participation Consent forms and Pre-Test surveys were administered at this meeting.

Prior to the implementation of the project the Professional and Contextual Associates were chosen. The intention was to meet with the Professionals on a weekly or bi-weekly basis in order to provide their expertise and advice. The Professional Associates were utilized in overseeing project development, assisting in reviewing and formatting the documents, consulting with issues and problems as they arose, meetings and phone conversations and much needed prayer. Due to the fact that Light of the Community was a small church start, some of the Contextual Associates were from Light of the Community and some were from other churches that were willing and instrumental in support and assistance where needed. The Contextual Associates were very active and involved in the project from beginning to end. These individuals have a concern for the researcher as well as being of assistance when called upon. The Contextual Associates were utilized in helping secure the training location; ensuring there was a video camera;

and white board available throughout the project; aiding in daily agenda of training and project exercises; developing educational tools; giving advice; and lending a hand when needed. The Contextual Associates also maintained time management by ensuring we did not run over or stay on a particular subject too long; setting up and tearing down tables and chairs; preparing food for participants from the pre-gathering session and throughout the project. During this project Rev. Pamela Jackson provided the instruction throughout the training.

The spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible study, meditation and reflection through journaling, based on Scripture, around the subject of discipleship and marriage were taught through a series of six, one and a half hour classes. Training covered many of the statistics and complications associated with broken relationships or marriages, such as unplanned pregnancy, single parent homes, unwed mothers and fathers, divorce, and stress. The process turned toward the values of covenantal love centered on the subject of marriage. At the last session, the Post-Test, evaluations and observations were dispersed. Sessions were recorded for validity and reliability of data analysis. An additional aspect of the project centered on the participants accepting and being in a relationship with Christ and a deeper relationship with community, involving a more redemptive relationship. Triangulation for this model were pre and post testing, student evaluation forms, and Context Associate and Student Observation Surveys.

Preliminary Timeline, Schedule, and Instrumentation

During the timeframe of May 4, 2015 through May 8, 2015, there was a pre-project meeting with the congregation in order to determine who was interested in the

Christ-centered Relationship and Marriage project. The timeline and schedule was shared with potential participants. This included issues pertaining to snacks or a light meal and child care. The format of the project was given and participants were identified. There were pledges of commitment forms obtained from participants who agreed to take part in the project.

On May 8, 2015 the pretest was dispersed and administered to participants in order for it to be completed prior to the training. The objective was to gauge attitudes toward relationships and marriage. After all sessions were completed, the posttest was dispersed in order to measure attitudinal change between it and the pretest. The training dates were scheduled during this period.

On June 8, 2015 student Evaluation forms were completed by each participant on the topics taught and quality of instruction. The goal was to triangulate any responses given as a result of the training. Evaluation forms were given on the same day, at the end of the last training session.

From May 12, 2015 through June 8, 2015, the classes were held and consisted of six, one and a half hour sessions, nine to eleven hours total. All classes were recorded. The pretest survey was given in the first meeting; the posttest survey, student evaluation forms, and the Context Associates and Student Observation surveys will be given in the last session:

Prior to the classes, the pretest of questions was administered dealing with the potential complications and solutions of relationships and marriages. Christian Education training on the spiritual disciplines was utilized for the spiritual formation of the congregants in order to measure a change in attitude or perception pertaining to Christ-

centered relationships and marriage. Once all classes were completed, the posttest of questions will be distributed in order to measure any variation between it and the pretest.

Statistical data pertaining to relationships and marriages was taught on day one, while day two consisted of exploring the complications that arise in relationships and marriages. Day three examined the reasons relationships and marriages fail. Day four provided training on godly values for Christ-centered relationships (to include celibacy). Days five and six covered godly values for Christ-centered marriage. Bibles and literature were furnished to participants as the classes were taught. The literature was based on that particular day's topic. Each session was recorded.

Research Design

Surveys were developed as a part of the methodology designed for this project in order to engage the participant's thoughts and feelings regarding Christ-centered relationships toward marriage and its impact on them. They were disseminated before and after the training for collection of this information. A few preliminary sample questions from the Pre and Post test in the form of statements were as follows: (1) People have complications in their relationships and marriages because there is no common spiritual focus; (2) Relationships require a purpose which advances them toward deeper affection and appreciation for each partner; and (3) Marriage is intended by God for the development of the Holy family. The answers to the pre and post tests questions were provided in the form of responses to; Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Somewhat Agree = 3, Agree = 4, Strongly Agree = 5. Each response was correlated with a number being sufficient to analyze and convert the data into percentages. The question, "To what

extent do you agree with the following statements,” was asked as a part of the instructions for completing the survey. Students were also asked to rate the statements honestly and truthfully based upon their own wisdom, knowledge, experiences, and feelings. Each statement was weighted with that numerical value for compilation of the data.

Measurement and Instrumentation

Utilizing the Qualitative Method of measurement was used for this project by applying an inductive approach through evaluating and observations during the project. Measurement included the investigation and exploration of the impact on congregants in their pursuance of a Christ-centered relationship toward marriage through their attitudes, beliefs, values, behaviors and culture.

Throughout this process a Summary of Learning was required after every Intensive and Peer Session. God was transforming the Pastor in order to impart the Christ-centered relationship towards Marriage Model to her congregants in a loving and caring manner. The Pastor found out through discernment that she was the project and God had given her abundant grace and understanding in order to assist those at Light of the Community Christian Church. The Intensives and Peer sessions gave an increasingly deeper and broader educational base, applying a less harsh overtone and a more compassionate and benevolent approach with her congregants. The Pastor was humbled and blessed throughout this journey while attending the opening chapel and plenary sessions. Thankfully, God continued to revitalize, renew, refresh and restore the project

administrator who overflowed into the participants. This was the first project expectation which was a requirement of the Doctor of Ministry program.

The second expectation of this project was to measure attitudinal change in the participants pertaining to Christ-centered relationships and marriage. A third expectation was that Christian formation through the spiritual disciplines would empower them with a biblical foundation that could deepen and enrich their relationships. A fourth expectation was for the training to encourage participants toward practicing the spiritual disciplines to continue enhancing their spiritual formation even after the project concluded.

Triangulation for this model came from pre and post testing, evaluation forms, and Context Associate and Student Observation Survey's. The pre and post tests were the first tool for data collection and triangulation and to measure student attitudes pertaining to relationships and marriage, before and after the Christian Education training classes. The pretest served to demonstrate their feelings or attitudes prior to the training and the posttest measured any changes in attitude after the training. Each session was based on Scripture from the Bible relevant to the session.

An evaluation form, the second tool for triangulation of data, consisting of questions that students or context associates responded to in order to provide their personal evaluation of the project, and what they learned. Their evaluations covered resource materials, content, professionalism, privacy, thoroughness of subjects, and timeliness of beginning through ending sessions. This form was dispersed at the end of the sixth session.

The third tool for triangulation, the Context Associates and Student Observation Surveys were dispersed. They consisted of a set of questions which allowed for responses

offering personal observations pertaining to the project training. This survey was dispersed at the end of the sixth day. The student observations included teaching methods, teaching criteria, topics taught, interaction between student and instructor, classroom climate, services provided, and the overall effectiveness of the training. Observations provided by the context associates will help the facilitator determine what was observed in hope of confirming the data collected from the other surveys and future training.

The responses to all surveys and the recordings will be studied, reviewed, and evaluated. The evaluation began with a qualitative analysis of the data taken from the pre and post tests and any data that can be derived from the recordings of the classes themselves. The objective was to measure impact in attitude or outlook on relationships and marriage; as a result of any personal growth and development or lack thereof. The focus was centered on the spiritual formation and empowerment of congregants through Christian Education on the spiritual disciplines for a Christ-centered relationship toward marriage.

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERIENCE

Collection of Data

Execution of the Project

The first phase of the project was the pre-gathering session. Letters were sent to twelve persons who were willing to volunteer their time to participate in the project. The pre-gathering session was held on Friday, May 8, 2015, six o'clock in the evening at the Co-Pastor's home. The meeting was held in order to inform and provide details of the project to all of the participants, including baby-sitting, meals and training location. We also had to agree on the availability of dates and a start and end time for the training. Two of the participants arrived on time, six were late, and four did not attend. The meeting commenced, no one was in need of a baby sitter for the training, it was agreed that a light meal would be available prior to the training for those who would like to partake.

Details of the project were discussed, such as, topics, length of sessions, and duration of project, choosing the days and times for assembling being most convenient for the collective. The days of the week chosen were Monday's and Tuesday's. The dates chosen for the month of May were the 12th, 19th, and the 26th. For the month of June, the day and dates were Tuesdays, starting with the 1st and with the fifth and sixth class sessions being completed consecutively on Tuesday the 8th. All classes were held from

5:30 through 7:30 p.m. However on the 8th training was held from 5:00 to 8:30 p.m. covering the latter two sessions. The only interruption was a reschedule from June 1st to Wednesday June 3rd, of session number four, because one of the students had a conflict that could not be avoided, the situation was discussed amongst the participants, everyone checked their schedules and were thankfully available on the new date. All eight participants completed both their consent forms and the Pre Test Survey. Pizza was ordered and we shared the meal, and ended in prayer.

Because of some difficulties that arose at the church an alternate location had to be chosen. A peer offered a local alternative location and it was agreed that the training would take place there on Thursday's. During the pre-gathering session a third nearby location was offered as a convenience for Monday's and Tuesday's because Thursday was not an option for some participants. Letters and emails were sent to the participants regarding the modified training location and the building which were found to be convenient and conducive to learning. Everyone involved in the project was satisfied and pleased with the facility. The Letters, emails and phone calls were essential in assuring all participants were informed and kept abreast of any changes or adjustments that might have occurred. There was one participant without access to email, phone calls were made to that individual. Notebooks, folders, pens, highlighters, and pencils were purchased for the participants to use during the sessions.

The second phase of the project began with the first day, May 12, 2015. An email was sent to all participants with directions to the facility and a thank you in advance of their on-time arrival. Reverend Barnes-Jackson arrived forty-five minutes early in order to prepare for the training. Arriving early worked effectively in preparation of the training

facility. Set up and tear downs required assistance and the Contextual Associates arrived early for every session in order to set up the video camera, arrange chairs and tables and any other assistance required. Each of the sessions were set-up and torn down one-half hour prior and one-half hour after the training. Setting up also included training materials laid at each of the participant's learning station around the table. Every participant had a daily agenda on their learning station for each session.

At the pre-gathering meeting Reverend Barnes-Jackson suggested that prior to the training a light meal could be provided. Some of the participants would be arriving from work and would eliminate any obstacle of feeling hungry during the training. It was decided a light meal prior to the training would be beneficial for the participants. The Contextual Associates also contributed to preparing and placing food on the table, ensuring ice was available for drinks, sufficient plates, utensils, drinking cups, and napkins were on hand. More than half of the participants arrived one-half an hour early, partook of the meal, and enjoyed it. The other participants did not share in the meal due to time constraints from work. They were allowed to snack during the training, and a few of the participants took some of the unused food home. One of the participants was not able to eat certain foods to ensure a level of comfort the meals were designed with all participants in mind. As the training progressed, it was agreed that chips, dips, fruit and bottled water would be the best solution for the remainder of the training. It was suggested that everyone bring a snack for the last class, all of the participants with the exception of one brought snacks or drinks.

After the training sessions, tear downs included wiping off and breaking down the white board, placing the chairs and tables back into their original places, re-packing the

unused portion of food and snacks, dismantling the video camera, emptying the trash, cleaning the floors, ensuring all windows were closed and that lights and appliances were turned off. The Contextual Associates were a tremendous help.

Co-Pastor Barnes-Jackson was the instructor throughout the project. Her husband, Senior Pastor of the church and Contextual Associate used his knowledge of the doctoral program to help guide progress and help prepare for all of the classes. He set up and broke down everything used for the training, recorded the sessions, assisted with meals, helped to steer and keep order throughout the training. A Deaconess in the church assisted in dispersing the pre and post tests, and the observation and evaluation forms. She provided support by reading and editing documents, preparing materials, helping with meals, and various other tasks.

Two of the individuals did not attend the first session and decided they would not be returning. A phone call was made to thank them for the time they had already given toward the project, and to invite them to continue the classes. There were six participants; two men and four women remained throughout the project. It was decided two Context Associates would be adequate to assist during the course. They were an invaluable resource and extremely helpful prior to, during and after the training.

The spiritual discipline of prayer was utilized at the onset of every session. The instructor prayed the first session and allowed the participants to pray the remainder of the sessions. The art of *Lectio Divina* was introduced then practiced at the beginning of each class. The Latin term *Lectio Divina* means divine reading and includes the spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible study, meditation, and reflection. A passage from the Bible was read slowly, repeated twice, and an article for self reflection was read. Each day

there was an inspired reading on the subjects of physical relaxation and how to quiet the mind, talking to God, prayer, worship, silent listening, and the embrace of God. After the readings, the participants personally reflected on how the Scriptures and articles connected with their daily living and choices they made. This activity of reflection through journaling was given ten minutes. They wrote in their journals the reflection of their feelings regarding the readings. It was made clear that the journaling was for their eyes only and did not need to be shared with anyone but God.

Dialogue was focused on the topic of each day and participants were involved throughout the training sessions. Discussion was at times controversial and argumentative, however, all dialogue was done in order and persons were respectful to each other. There were times when some of the participants had to limit their comments due to time constraints. Topics for the sessions were derived from the instructor's journey and corresponded with the biblical complications and solutions for this project. Day one of the training centered on statistical data on relationships and marriage. Training revolved around the statistical trends in being single, marriage rates, family growth, cohabitation figures, divorce rates, and birth rates among single and unwed persons. Day two dealt with complications that arise in relationships and marriages, such as, sexual infidelity, non-covenantal and no commitment, jealousy, selfishness, and time limitations.

Day three involved six reasons relationships and marriages fail, topics included; lack of communication, lack of spontaneity, lack of compromise, focusing on the past, negative energy, and leading separate lives. Day four instructions were on godly (biblical) values for Christ-centered relationships including celibacy and the training revolved around Scripture, dating like-minded individuals, guarding your heart, types of

friends, and celibacy as it pertains to unmarried persons, modern day monks, nuns, priests, Jesus and Paul. Days five and six covered a two-part series on godly (biblical) values for a Christ-centered marriage which were covered in the same day and incorporated Scripture and featured the keys to commitment: obligation, education, attraction, financial stability, and the need for the presence of Christ in the marriage.

The sixth session of the training began after a thirty minute rest and snack break. After the second half of the training on biblical values for a Christ-centered marriage, one of the participants played the piano and we sang a couple songs. We then shifted into Thanksgiving Over the Waters and ended in a communion service. The Thanksgiving Over the Waters entailed a reaffirmation of faith to God through Jesus Christ. Each participant took a pebble out of the water which represented baptism, cleansing and spiritual nourishment. Although everyone participated one student had reservations regarding the service of Thanksgiving Over the Waters due to a lack of understanding United Methodist practices and the instructor explained that the symbolic ritual of was a depiction of Christian baptism. These activities were a necessary step in the final phase of this project in order for the participants to make a connection with God through Christ to establish a relationship toward marriage.

Each session also included exercises pertaining to the subject of the day. Some of them dealt with couples in the Bible, hypothetically being stranded on an island, Christianity and marriage charades, and the creation of a television advertisement pertaining to Christ-centered relationships or marriage. These exercises were enjoyed by all; the participants commented that the exercises were pleasant and focused around the

training. Prior to the benediction of each session everyone received the opportunity to share their final thoughts as a part of the daily wrap-up.

Third phase of the project was the distribution of the posttest, student and Contextual Associate Observation surveys and student Evaluation forms. Both pre and post-tests was centered on the participants' excitement and enthusiasm level during the project. The questions were formed in order to measure positive or negative movement after the training. The observation forms not only involved what they saw, but also what they heard and how they felt. Evaluation forms were formulated to gauge the impact on participants. The measurement tools of Evaluation and Observation forms were key in distinguishing how the instructor taught, body language, level of understanding and knowledge of the subjects, and whether the goals or expectations were met. Reverend Barnes-Jackson was pleased with the overall project and sensed the participants were content and pleased with the training sessions.

Data Collection Methods

The main data collection methods were Pre and Post Tests, Student Evaluation Forms, Student and Contextual Associate Observation Forms, and video recording. The data was collected, compiled, reviewed, examined, and assessed. All participant responses were input into a table and converted into percentages for analyzed and compared. Reverend Barnes-Jackson incorporated all evaluation forms into the findings. The videos were reviewed and analyzed for recollection of activities and missed observations. A comparison of the pre and post test revealed positive or negative movement in participants' attitudes pertaining to Christ-centered relationships toward

marriage. The outcome of each participant's charted data, per question, was listed as the variance. After the examination of all data the results were considered in relation to the project's success, conclusions and future suggestions.

Analysis of Data

Pre and Post Test

Pre and post test questions were organized from strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree. There were ten statements which were to be answered candidly and honestly based upon the participant's experience, understanding, perception and beliefs. Scores associated with each question was Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Somewhat Agree = 3, Agree = 4, and Strongly Agree = 5.

The responses to all tests, surveys, and observations, were analyzed, studied, reviewed, assessed, and evaluated. Evaluation began with a qualitative analysis of the data taken from the pre and post tests and any data that could have been derived from the video recordings of the classes themselves. One of the objectives was to investigate and explore the impact of having congregants engage in a Christ-centered relationship toward marriage. Another measure was the variances or any changes in attitude or outlook on biblical values for Christ-centered relationships and marriage. A final measure suggested whether there was a result of any personal growth and spiritual development or the lack thereof. The intention was to train on the spiritual disciplines which in turn would spiritually form the participants in order to establish a deeper relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Their personal development could then overflow into their relationships, marriages, and families; affecting their children and the surrounding

community. If each church could affect their congregations with Christian principles for Christ-centered relationships and marriage, it could potentially affect the world.

Student Evaluation Form

The evaluation form was created to gauge the participant's opinion about the training. It consisted of ten questions that queried them about their personal experiences relative to the training, its impact, its success and the instructor. This form was utilized in conjunction with the observation forms and the pre and post tests to establish triangulation, validity and reliability.

Context Associate/Student Observation Form

Three perspectives were provided as the third triangulation method focused on observations pertaining to the gathering of classes, the training, classmates, materials provided, training facility, and those providing instruction throughout the experience. This particular tool along with the evaluation form gave the point of view of the participants, Contextual Associates and the instructor.

Outcome

Discussion

The Pre and Post Test were developed to measure the attitudinal change of the participants pertaining to spiritual formation training in the areas of Christ-centered relationships, marriage, their complications, participant formation and spiritual maturity, spiritual disciplines, sexual boundaries, biblical knowledge, evangelism, and family

community relations. These tests also provided triangulation in conjunction with the other measurement tools in working toward the success of the project, and relevant to the participant's beliefs, outlook, attitude and values in having a Christ-centered relationship toward marriage.

As a result of the method used for examining the pre and post test responses, determinations were made in evaluating what the data suggested, in relation to any changes of responses following the training sessions. The answers to the ten questions from the training evaluation forms and the six questions from the observation forms were used to determine the student's and the training instructor's perception of the training and to gain insight about its effectiveness for each. It too was used to provide triangulation against the other surveys and responses toward the success of the project in measuring attitudinal changes pertaining to the student's thoughts and feelings about Christ-centered relationships toward marriage.

Results

There were six participants for this study. The credibility of the research was validated by the students through their experiences and encounters throughout the project. The demographics of the participants were two men and four women. Ages ranged from twenty-five to seventy-five. The relationship status of the students were, three had never been married, one was a widow and two had been divorced, one for over twenty-five years and the other for ten years. The data was compiled on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet by columns and rows in order to extrapolate data and maintain it in an organized fashion.

Results from the Pre and Post test were as follows: Question one stated “Is it important for you and your partner to have a relationship with Jesus?”¹ The data suggested on the pretest that 100% of the participants were in agreement although their responses fell between somewhat agree to strongly agreed. 50% of the participants remained consistent between the pre and post tests. Posttest results showed 100% strongly agreed after the training. There were no negative responses. The data suggests before the training that both partners agreed that they should be in a relationship with Jesus. After the training, the participant’s attitudinal perspectives changed to strongly agree in maintaining a relationship with Christ.

On Question two “I should date and marry an individual that has a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.”² The results of the data showed that 33.33% were consistent in strongly agreeing on both pre and posttest, they were in agreeance that an individual should date and marry someone who is in a relationship with Christ. 16.66% disagreed on the pretest, divulging that it was not an issue to date and marry someone who does not have a relationship with Christ, yet on their posttest, there was positive attitudinal change to strongly agree. This was a tremendous turn around going from the standpoint of dating or marrying an unchristian individual. By the end of the training, 100% of the group strongly agreed that choosing a partner who has a relationship with Christ Jesus is essential.

¹ Refer to Appendix C.

² Refer to Appendix C.

In question three, “Complications arise in relationships and marriages due to a lack of spiritually guided principles and a common focus on Christ.”³ A total of 50% of the participants on the pretest started at somewhat agree, yet on the posttest changed their responses to either agree or strongly agree. On the pretest 16.66% strongly agreed and remained the same on the posttest. The data suggested positive attitudinal change of 83.33% after the training denoting that many of the participants changed their mind pertaining to this particular question. On the pretest 16.66% disagreed however, on the posttest they changed their response to agree with the question. On the posttest 100% had responses that reflected their agreement with the question and there was no backward movement of responses after the training. The data suggest that there was a positive impact on the group pertaining to question number three.

On question four, “Having faith in Jesus Christ makes issues and problems in my relationships seem surmountable.”⁴ The data suggested 100% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed after the training. In their responses, 66.66% of the participants strongly agreed after the training and 33.33% of the participants remained at agree. Data showed 33.33% moved to agree after the training. 16.66% remained the same at strongly agree, yet 16.66 % changed their answer from disagree to agree.

In question five, “The spiritual form of relationships advances them toward a deeper affection and appreciation for God and each other.”⁵ The responses reveal 33.33% of the participants remained at agree during and after the training. The data also showed that 100% of the group agreed or strongly agree at some level after the training. There

³ Refer to Appendix C.

⁴ Refer to Appendix C.

⁵ Refer to Appendix C.

were no negative responses to this question. The data disclosed that 33.33% somewhat agreed before the training yet after the training changed their responses to strongly agreed. Another 33.33% changed their responses after the training from agree to strongly agree. 33.33% remained the same at agree after the training. There was 0% negative movement.

On question six, “My attitude toward commitment in a relationship should be based on Christian (biblical) values and not the worldly view.”⁶ The data suggested 16.66% of the participants remained the same at strongly agree and another 16.66% remained unchanged at agree. After the training, 83.33% of the responses strongly agreed and 100% of the group agreed at some level before and after the training. There was 0% negative movement for this particular question.

Question seven stated, “Setting the sexual boundary of celibacy until marriage is important to me.”⁷ On this question 100% of the group agreed at some level before and after the training and 50% remained the same in their responses. There was positive movement of 16.66% from agree to strongly agree and negative movement of 16.66% from strongly agree to agree on the post test. The data revealed that 66.66% of the group strongly agreed after the training.

On question eight, “It is important to me that I teach my children, or the next generation be taught to re-establish Christ-centered relationships culminating in a Christ-centered marriage.”⁸ On this question 100% of the group agreed at some level before and after the training and 50% remained the same in their responses. The data revealed

⁶ Refer to Appendix C.

⁷ Refer to Appendix C.

⁸ Refer to Appendix C.

33.33% remained the same at strongly agree on the posttest and 16.66% remained at agree. The data also disclosed, that 16.66% moved negatively in their response on the posttest from strongly agree to agree and 33.33% moved positively from agree to strongly agree.

Question nine stated, “Marriage according to the Word of God is between a man and woman, intended by God for the development of the family as God’s righteous seed.”⁹ On this question 100% of the group agreed at some level before and after the training and 83.33% remained the same in their responses. Of the participants 66.66% remained the same at strongly agree and 16.66% remained at agree. The data also suggested 16.66% moved positively from agree to strongly agree on the posttest. After the training 83.33% of the responses were strongly agree. There was 0% negative movement for all participants on this question.

On question ten, “Utilizing the spiritual disciplines of Bible study, prayer, journaling and reflection, and Christian meditation will lead to better relationships and the fulfillment of God’s will relating to marriage.”¹⁰ 50% remained the same in their responses. On this question 100% of the group agreed at some level before and after the training and 33.33% remained the same in their responses. The data revealed that 16.66% remained at agree and 16.66% remained at strongly agree. There was negative movement of 16.66% from agree to somewhat agree. There was also positive movement of 33.33% from agree to strongly agree and 16.66% moved from somewhat agree to strongly agree. There was a total of 66.66% strongly agreed after the training.

⁹ Refer to Appendix C.

¹⁰ Refer to Appendix C.

Due to the experiences of Christian education and spiritual formation in Rev. Barnes-Jackson's life, the project of a Christ-centered relationship toward marriage emerged. The hypothesis was formulated around some of the congregants at Light of the Community Christian Church who were unwed parents and raising children born out of wedlock. The pre and post tests were designed for the participants to complete before and after their training to measure any attitudinal change derived from the spiritual formation training. All of the members of the group completed the tests. The participants were in agreement that they experienced an attitude adjustment or shift in mindset after the training. The Contextual Associate and Instructor provided responses to the questions on the pre and post tests as well. The data was collected, compiled, organized, and analyzed by the Contextual Associate and the instructor. The results were compared for the purpose of determining results and drawing conclusions.

After having analyzed and examined the data, it was found that there were a great number of positive responses and very few negative ones, meaning that there were a small number of answers on the posttest that digressed from a more positive response. Based on the conclusions drawn from the responses of the compiled and analyzed material, the data strongly suggests that the project was a success.

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTION, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSION

Reflection

There was a great deal of prayer, reflection and contemplation during the preparation and implementation of the project. The motivating factor was to reach back and be of assistance to some of the congregants at Light of the Community Christian Church. Their Co-Pastor took a similar journey as the congregants and it was her hope to help bring some clarity into the participant's perspective. This study set out to determine if there could be an attitudinal change or shift in the participants through Christian Education by the utilization of the spiritual disciplines. Throughout the life of Rev. Barnes-Jackson she made choices and decisions which allowed this project to be birthed within her. In her first relationship no sexual boundaries were set, she chose a non-Christian as a mate, they had nothing in common, and lived as a dysfunctional family. Her tenacity to press toward the spiritual destiny God had for her was not without trials and tribulations. Rev. Barnes-Jackson was able to identify with her participants after living through similar issues and problems the congregants experienced.

The project allowed the church members to temporarily absorb the spiritual disciplines into their lives by observing the value of meditation, Bible study, prayer and reflection through journaling. These disciplines were chosen because they were essential

to Rev. Barnes-Jackson in overcoming the obstacles of negative decision making when confronting the issue of dating and marriage. Christian education has been incorporated into her life beginning with the foundations of Sunday school through present day as a Pastor and while completing a Doctor of Ministry degree at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. Rev. Barnes-Jackson has been transformed throughout this process. Her delving into the spiritual disciplines opened her mind to and being more passive and less aggressive when teaching and preaching. She realized the congregants would be willing to step out and allow communication to commence without fear of blame, fault, or guilt.

One of the first steps in this process was finding participants that were willing and had a yearning for spiritual formation, their conversion depended upon it. In order to acquire participants for this project, the determination was made that the training had to center around issues they were facing and living with. When confronting the congregants with the title of the project, some of them were excited and wanted to know if they could take part in it right away.

Interestingly, scheduling was one of the least problems that occurred during this process. When assembling for the pre-gathering session, it was determined to begin the training as soon as possible which reflected their work schedules and time set aside to complete the project. There were eight persons present at the pre-gathering meeting and once training commenced, six arrived and two decided to not be a part of the training. The conversation from Rev. Barnes-Jackson stressed three important items; timeliness, respect for all opinions, and ensuring once beginning the project one should remain throughout the duration of the training. The remaining six participants were very excited to begin.

It was noted early on in the training that some of the participants felt they may never marry, but if they did, it would be a Christ-centered relationship and marriage. Some of the participants have children and most of them understand the need to pass on the wisdom of Christian education through use of the spiritual disciplines in order to guide their children toward a relationship with Christ first, before initiating an affiliation with a partner. Rev. Pamela felt compelled to implement this God ordained project in order for individuals to understand a Christ-centered relationship is what their life was missing. They would attend church, but only out of habit. It was time to take them deeper into the Word and the love of God through Jesus Christ.

Prior to implementation of the training, the instructor contemplated and reflected on a few of the initial research questions that centered on lack of commitment, setting sexual boundaries, engaging in a Christ-centered relationship and Christ-centered marriage. In order to connect with the participants, the training materials had to be relevant and applicable. One of the authors presented to the participants was Bishop Joseph Walker, III. He wrote an inspiring book about our destiny that God has laid out for everyone, this book made a genuine connection with the group. In his book when he imparted, “One of the greatest revelations that any of us could come to in life is that we are constantly evolving. That is, our relationship with God is progressive. . . . And we are in process. God is working through our lives, crafting us, molding us to be the people that ultimately we are to become.”¹ As the class proceeded to engage in conversation around Walker’s statement, it was understood that God is working with each person at the level they are on, and we should want to establish a relationship with God through Jesus Christ

¹ Joseph W. Walker, III, *Date with Destiny: Find the Love You Need* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2011), 24.

in order to make conscientious decisions in our lives. The decisions we make today, are the decision we will pay for tomorrow.

Another great author, Dr. John Gottman wrote about marriage success or failure. Although the book was about marriages, it could be used in non-marital relationships as well. One of the topics discussed at some point in the training was negativity. Gottman gave four strategies for a healthy relationship or marriage, however, for this project, only three were used, “[C]alm yourself, speak and listen nondefensively, and validate each other.”² This was a fun discussion. A few of the participants were stating that it was tough to keep calm or communicate peace and love when negativity abounds, but this is where the validation of one another came in. Someone has to give in, concede. As long as one of the two reverses the destructive language, then change is not inevitable. Effective communication was one of the subjects talked about and the participants were in agreement that meditation is a great discipline to utilize when emotions are running high. At the onset of every class we always prayed first and moved into Lectio Divina. It became clear to the instructor that a calming down time was needed; a time for meditation from all of the days stress and strain, turning inward was a great release for some of the participants. Inevitably, the instructor was transformed by the exercises as well. The collective mindset was pooled together as one and centered on God.

One of the spiritual disciplines the instructor favored and the group preferred was Bible study. We studied the Old and New Testaments which were utilized for the project, Genesis 38:11-19 and John 2:1-9. Genesis text dealt with Judah and Tamar and their tumultuous relationship. The participants were able to not only connect with both

² John W. Gottman, *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail: And How You Can Make Yours Last* (New York, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 175.

characters but also associate some of their previous decisions based on occurrences dealt with by Judah and Tamar. When the instructor chose this Genesis text, God was at work planning the transformation which was going to occur in Rev. Barnes-Jackson. As the instructor reflected on when she left home, the discussion centered on how to deal with making decisions not based on parental guidance, but upon one's own experiences. Some of the participants agreed and had similar encounters. Towards the end of the conversation, it was agreed that depending upon God through Jesus Christ was the answer. Broken commitments were an exchange that also took place. There are individuals that will verbally agree to do a certain thing and have no intention of acting upon it. The group discussed how important it is to ensure being Christ-centered when commencing a relationship with someone. Other topics discussed around Judah and Tamar were loss of integrity, having a child or children born out of wedlock, lust and not love, the act of fornication and the humiliation that comes with it.

When moving into the New Testament text of John 2, the instructor touched on her spiritual autobiography. This was the perfect time to inform the group about the trials she had gone through. Rev. Barnes-Jackson felt that if she witnessed about her struggles, then the group would not feel as they could not share, we were all looking for a breakthrough. The participants began opening up and disclosing situations that happened and felt comfortable and the confidentiality pledge was even more reassuring. The John 2 text allowed the instructor to finally achieve peace in her life. The group conversed on ensuring Christ as being at the center of our being as well as in our relationships, that we must invite Christ into our lives. Having a Christ-centered partner was also discussed and understood by all most that it was important, however, there was one participant that

stated the person they were involved with was a non-believer, but through prayer and being Christ-centered the person came to Christ. Throughout the Bible study, most of the participants began to have breakthroughs on being Christ-centered. Spiritual formation was achieved to some degree amongst the participants. At the instructor spoke individually to the participants, two of the participants divulged they had been transformed and experienced a change of attitude about dating and the possibility of marriage.

The data showed that prior to the training the participants that all the participants agreed to some degree that they should be in relationship with Jesus Christ. The instructor felt that since all the participants were believers, all of the answers on having a relationship with Christ would be strongly agree. As the responses were tallied, 50% of the participants strongly agreed, 16.66 % agreed, and 16.66% somewhat agreed. As the training ended and the participants completed their post tests, there was 100% agreeance that a relationship with Christ is essential. This was an overwhelming feeling for the instructor. There was a breakthrough for some of the participants.

Further reflection by the instructor regarding the statistics on relationships and marriages provided enlightenment and great discussion. One of the sessions involved marriage and relationship statistics. Some of the statistics came from different credible sources such as, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Vital Statistics on Marriage and Divorce Rate trends and cohabitation trends and statistics, For Your Marriage.org which featured an article dealing with why marriage matters, the Barna Group, The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services report on National Health Statistics dealing with first marriages in the United States. Each student had a packet of

statistical information for them to review and take home. These statistics were vital to the project for the instructor.

As the instructor continues to reflect on the project, it must be noted that not only at Light of the Community Christian Church but also at other churches, the Pastors must be spiritually formed and leading a life that resembles being family oriented, reflects being in a Christ-centered relationship if the Pastor is not married, and supportive of the needs and concerns of why marriage matters, while maintaining a connection with the families of the congregation. Pastors must preach and teach on marriage and how it was in God's original plan for humans to be joined together as man and wife. The church must uphold God's Word and help alleviate some of the problems families are facing today by remaining single with children, both parents not living with their children, and children being raised by partners of the parent. As Rev. Barnes-Jackson's exuberance for God's project began to overflow, she was able to pass on the joy to her congregants, for transformation and elevation in taking them to the next level God has for them

Further reflection revealed that on one of the training days, one of the participants had a situation arise and would not be able to attend, the group decided to train on a different day for that week and the situation was managed. Working together in a Christ-like manner was another type of instruction on how to deal with mishaps and upsets when they arise in one's life, the instructor was very satisfied with the outcome.

As the training sessions came to a close, the final day was very spiritual and a feeling of the Holy Spirit was present. When we met for the pre-gathering session, it was determined to cover two days on June 8, 2015. We met for four hours. We decided as a group to all share in the meal for that evening, mostly everyone participated and we ate

together as the disciples shared in their last meal with Christ prior to the crucifixion. After our meal, we sang a couple hymns and then engaged in Thanksgiving Over the Waters, a reaffirmation of faith and a communion service. There was one participant who did not want to participate, after discussing the process, the participant concurred to participate. The instructor was flexible enough that if the participant did not want to partake, the group would continue and the person could go into another room if necessary. In the aftermath, all participants took part in both services. As a part of the reaffirmation service, the instructor placed smooth pebbles in water, every participant, Contextual Associate and instructor reached into the water and withdrew a pebble signifying going down into the water and how the water flowed over the pebble and became shinier and clean just as the Jesus being the living water can give each of us a new heart for Christ. Both ceremonies were important to Rev. Barnes-Jackson because of her faith journey and how it culminated in the re-dedication of her life to Christ and a communion service.

The project was a success and the effect it left on the participants was extraordinary. The data suggested that 100% of the participants agreed that they would make different decisions after participating in this training. This was the impact Rev. Barnes-Jackson was seeking. One of the project expectations was for the group to make an attitudinal change, wanting to engage in a Christ-centered relationship toward marriage. This project could be of great use for other churches in order to re-establish the holy family for God through Jesus Christ.

Summary

Rev. Pamela Barnes-Jackson is the Pastor of Light of the Community Christian Church. She was the instructor for this training project. Spiritual formation becomes transparent when the believer has been transformed by God. No one else can spiritually form us except God, and of course we must make the first step to ask God to form us in order to be equipped to do God's will. Spiritual formation was an intentional direction for Rev. Barnes-Jackson. She had survived her first marriage without attending church, her children not being able to be baptized and after the thirteenth year, she was hard pressed to get back to God. Through all the struggle and heartache, she turned her back on God, but God never left her side. This project was significant due to the formation that elevated Rev. Barnes-Jackson into the Pastor she is today. She found out she was the project and God was using her to witness regarding her past and light the path for someone who is caught up in a similar situation. The project's duration was six weeks, the Methodology included qualitative data compilation and triangulation resulted from the pre and post tests, evaluation, and observation forms. The outcome of the training validated that in order to be Christ-centered, one must be spiritually formed.

Chapter One, "Ministry Focus" comprised her spiritual passage and spiritual autobiography. Included in this chapter was demographic information about the church and the community which it resides. There were three synergy points for her, Christian education, spiritual formation and Christ-centered marriage. The spiritual formation of Rev. Barnes-Jackson was a culmination of her life and how God was leading her every step of the way, at times without her knowing it. She was a Jonah and kept running from God. God was calling her to be a minister, a Co-Pastor alongside of her husband, but

Rev. Barnes-Jackson turned a deaf ear to the Lord. In the end, the God won out and she stepped into her role as Co-Pastor and has been on fire to the Lord ever since. She has always been light-hearted, never slinging harsh and cruel words at the congregation, or being insensitive. She wanted to be different from what she had experienced, she had a unique voice and was ready to use it. Interestingly enough her experiences intertwined with some of the congregants at her church. When her eyes opened and saw there was a need for family and marriage training, God began making ways for this project to take place. God was birthing this project in Rev. Barnes-Jackson. It was her intent to share the good news that God wants to re-establish the holy family, the righteous seed.

Family and marriage trends in this post modern world are to the contrary, unchristian and focused on non-traditional viewpoints when it comes to lineage and matrimony statistics. The objective of the training was to impart statistics, give insight regarding why relationships and marriages fail, and complication that arise in relationships and marriage and Scripture supporting why marriage matters.

Pastors must value Christian education and how important and significant it is for the congregants. Christian education is key to spiritual formation which comes from God by incorporating the spiritual disciplines into one's life. It is imperative that ministers, Lay Leaders, Elders, Deacons and Deaconess share in Christian education and be willing to witness their faith journeys to the congregants, so the congregation does not feel alone in their despair. The project was exceptional and must be passed on to other churches in order to help re-establish the family and the righteous seed God ordained in the Garden of Eden.

Chapter Two, “The State of the Art in This Ministry Project” focused on the prophetic proclamation or call of Rev. Barnes-Jackson from the Lord proclaiming spiritual formation was a necessity in order to re-establish the holy family and righteous seed of God for the growth and development of the church to win families for Christ. If the congregants could be spiritually formed through the spiritual disciplines of Bible study, meditation, prayer, and reflection through journaling, it could move them into wanting a deeper relationship with Christ that could overflow into their families, into their communities, and eventually the world. Chapter two dealt with three areas of interest for Rev. Barnes Jackson centered around her prophetic vision of Spiritual Formation of Relationships and Marriage, Christian Education Toward Spiritual Maturity, and Christ-centered Relationships toward marriage.

Chapter Three, “Theoretical Foundation and Review of Literature “, targeted the theoretical basis for the project commencing with the Problem and concluding with the Solutions. An exegetical examination of both problem and solution were imparted in the Biblical section entitled, “Complications and Solutions to Improper Relationships and Marriages”. Rev. Barnes-Jackson navigated her way through the Bible, with the help of the Holy Spirit and she embarked on an expositional journey to deal with the dilemma of broken families, broken commitments and single parent homes. The next section’s focal point is Historical, chronicling and giving account regarding how marriage has gone through its evolutionary and transformative stages, beginning with the Pre-Nicene Era to the Twenty-First Century. The third topic of Theological foundation, centers on “Why Marriage Matters”, “Spiritual Formation”, “Christian Education”, and “Christ-centered

Marriage”. These themes made a segway into Theological perspectives of ecclesiastical doctrine from a range of theologians.

Chapter Four dealt with the “Methodology“, and the main objective was to identify the method chosen for data analysis which was qualitative. The chapter opens with The Hypothesis which then shifts to the Intervention (Description of the Ministry Project) which covered the “Preliminary Timeline, Schedule and Instrumentation of the project. These topics gave groundwork for the anticipated project dates, schedule of classes and how to measure the collected data.

At this point, Rev.Barnes-Jackson’s model of ministry was the Christ-centered Relationship toward Marriage Model was about to unfold. The tools or instrumentation utilized for this project were Pre and Post Test, Evaluation Form and Observation Form. The hypothesis was due to a lack of spiritual formation and Christian education, some of the congregants at Light of the Community Christian Church were living with partners, unwed parents and single parent homes. It was the anticipation and expectation that through Christian education utilizing the spiritual disciplines of Bible study, prayer, meditation, and reflection through journaling could put stability back into their homes and engage in a Christ-centered relationship toward marriage.

The pre and post tests questions were aligned with the project’s expectations which were; to measure attitudinal change in the participants pertaining to Christ-centered relationships and marriage; Christian education on the spiritual disciplines may empower participants with a biblical foundation that will guide their decisions toward relationships and marriage; through the utilization of the spiritual disciplines, spiritual formation may occur to some degree in participants with the power of the Holy Spirit.

The questions also supported the Biblical text Genesis 38:11-19 and John 2:1-9.

Teachings on the spiritual disciplines made a fantastic celestial interconnection with the participants in the hope that there would be a spiritual awakening for them when measuring and computing their responses. There was a great team effort between the instructor and the Contextual Associate when engaging conversation and dialogue on the disciplines.

The preliminary timeline was a fantastic tool and outline of the project in order to stay on task and keep in step with the DMin calendar of events that were to be completed and deadline dates. Once training was completed, all tests, forms and surveys were calculated, studied, evaluated, and examined. A qualitative analysis of all data from the pre and post test surveys, evaluation and observation forms, including the video of the sessions, when needed, were assessed in order to ascertain if personal development could be achieved in order to win more families for Christ and engaging a Christ-centered relationship toward marriage.

In chapter Five “Field Experience”, is where Rev, Barnes-Jackson defined the ministry intervention praxis or the relevance of the project. As the project began, the scheduling of the training sessions went smoothly and efficient. A meal was discussed and everyone agreed that it would be beneficial to accommodate the group with serving of food. A baby sitter was on stand-by if needed in order to ensure any mishap that could occur. The training had a profound effect on most of the participants and all enjoyed the sessions which included some group members called Rev. Barnes-Jackson looking to do a post class in order to reconnect and discuss what has happened personally since the training. When examining the responses Rev. Barnes-Jackson, was able to measure and

gauge behaviors and attitudes regarding Christ-centered marriage. The field experience allowed the instructor to gain insight on the thoughts and experiences of the participants in order to help them achieve a more solid Biblical and spiritual method when making decisions toward relationships and marriage. It was definitely merited and necessitates for future training, including more of the spiritual disciplines and inclusion of married persons. The field experience, by and large, was accomplished with great success, including data collection which supported the participant's responses.

Conclusion

There were four spiritual disciplines discussed and addressed, Bible study, prayer, meditation and reflection through journaling. Rev. Barnes-Jackson found her passion and enthusiasm by incorporating the above disciplines in her life, in turn she felt compassion for her congregants and with God through Jesus Christ this project was formed. The instructor had a pivotal moment during her matriculation at United Theological Seminary when she arrived at the realization that she was the project and the need to re-establish holy families and the righteous seed that God originated in the Garden of Eden. There is a cultural revelation happening across the world, and standing for Christ-centered marriage is essential for churches in continuing effective preaching and praxis.

Rev. Barnes-Jackson was so pleased and delighted that when the group met at the pre-gathering session, all were able to come together and plan out the days for the training without any major disruptions. It was also emphasized that once the training began, no session could be missed so the participants made the commitment to eagerly contribute and share in the project. However, there were a couple issues, one involved a

participant having to go out of town and it was agreed we would meet the same week but on a different day and the other issue was when arranging days for the training it was a unanimous decision to hold two of the training days on one day in order to meet the schedules of the participants. It was also a wise decision to have the participants complete all of their post tests, surveys and forms immediately after the training, while lessons were fresh in their minds.

The pre and post test outcomes brought responses from the participants from ten questions which were inserted into the tests in order to measure attitudinal changes regarding Christ-centered relationships toward marriage. Four questions had considerable influence on the group. Data suggested that most of them modified their answers after the training to move them to be in a Christ-centered relationship.

Question one on the pre and post tests stated how important for both partners to be in a Christ-centered relationship. This was crucial in determining prior to the training how significant it was for the participants in choosing a Christ-centered partner. It was determined after examination of the responses that all participants on the pre test, to some degree agreed both partners should be in a Christ-centered relationship. On the post test, 100% of the group strongly agreed that their partner should be in a Christ-centered relationship. When couples are both Christian believers, equally yoked as stated in 2 Corinthians 6:14, they are stronger and have equal leverage within their relationship. However, if they are unequally yoked, one could have power over the other, being opposites may make the relationship volatile and unstable. Rev. Barnes-Jackson was in a marriage with a non-believer which was the basis for this Christ-centered marriage training which entails how important it is for God through Jesus Christ to be the heart of

the family. When the participants heard her spiritual journey, it had significant relevance to their situations which provided a connection between instructor and student.

Question six of the pre and post test conveyed the attitude of the participant concerning commitment in a relationship. Being in a committed relationship is an important step for any couple. Commitment and mutuality aids the couple willing to make a promise to one another also having mutual respect and sharing Christian values set the stage for the path or direction their relationship takes. When computing the responses of this question 16.66% somewhat agreed and after the training the same participant strongly agreed. Rev. Barnes-Jackson was exhilarated in this turn-around from somewhat to strongly agree regarding commitment. Commitment could involve a type of anxiety or stress when it comes to pledging or being in obligation to a partner. It was through instruction on the spiritual disciplines where the participants made the connection of being in union or bonded to Christ just as one should be in union or committed to their partner. The remaining 83.33% of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed before and after the training. This positive movement shows attitudinal change in the group informing Rev. Barnes-Jackson that engaging in a committed relationship allows for a deepening and mutual relationship with Jesus Christ.

Question ten inquired about whether the utilization of the spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible study, meditation, and reflection through journaling would lead to better relationships and fulfill God's will for marriage. After the training, 83.33% of the group fell between somewhat agreed and strongly agreed, although, 16.66% showed backward movement from agree to somewhat agree. The majority showed positive progression confirming that spiritual disciplines applied into the lives of the participants would lead

to an improved relationship. However, 16.66% agreed with the statement, but not strongly, informing the instructor that more discussion is needed surrounding God's will.

On the evaluation form question eight asked, did you learn something new? Responses showed that 100% of the participants answered yes to this question. The responses ranged from Meditation techniques, Lectio Divina, journaling, Bible study, marriage/relationship statistics, Christ is a must in our relationships. Rev. Barnes-Jackson was excited everyone in the group learned something new.

The instructor understands that becoming Christ-centered and engaging in a Christ-centered marriage might not happen overnight, but the time to begin is now. The training was successful because Rev. Barnes-Jackson was transformed throughout the project by being more compassionate and understanding than being oppressive and harsh through her teaching. Another rationale for success was that the participants to some degree were spiritual formed due to the spiritual disciplines of Bible study, prayer, meditation and reflection through journaling.

Future research could include: (1) Follow up with participants in three to six month timeframe in order to converse regarding how the individual's life has changed, if any, (2) a three day Couple Retreat, at a State Park or resort that is not too expensive. The invitation should be inclusive, for married and non-married couples, (3) Christ-centered Relationships Toward Marriage Seminars at different church locations.

In conclusion, engaging in a Christ-centered relationship is the first step of a person's life toward finding a suitable mate and eventual spouse. Enhancing one's relationship with Christ is very important and remaining committed in the relationship

through reliance on God is too. Bible study will be of assistance to the individual or couple looking to grow in their faith walk together, gaining spiritual maturity.

In summary, the Pastor of the church must recognize their need for transformation which allows for growth and taking better care of congregants. Once Pastors become aware of their own need for self-reflection, being able to be truthful about who they are, stepping out on faith in showing accountability, integrity, and honor, then they can better equip them to be in relationship with Christ. Healing was also one of the significant events that occurred within the Pastor. Being able to forgive and heal the brokenness can only happen with Jesus. He is the one who has the healing power over your life and heart. Once the congregants have been informed and instructed in the spiritual disciplines they reach spiritual maturity. They might gain a willingness to share with others, to evangelize to other families who might be interested in remaining grounded in God's written Word, the Bible, or make a commitment to follow God through Jesus Christ.

Finally, Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 gives account of why marriage matters, "Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him who is alone, if he falls and has not another to lift him up. Again, if two lie together, they are warm; but how can one be warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him. A threefold cord is not easily broken."³ The two represent the husband and wife, working together as a team, upholding the Word of God, allowing Jesus Christ to be at the center of the marriage. It is remarkable that the first miracle Jesus performed was at the marriage in Cana. Of all the miracles God could have had Jesus execute, the first was at a wedding. When God made

³ Ecc 4:9-12 (NKJV)

man and woman, he introduced marriage in the Garden of Eden, they were to help each other, as the Scripture stated above, if one falls, the other lifts them up.

This project has played an impact on the life of Rev. Barnes-Jackson. She has been blessed and continues to be blessed in her Christ-centered marriage. When looking back it was the spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible study, meditation and reflection through journaling that allowed her to grow and be spiritually formed by God. She feels successful because of her personal testimony and witness to the Scripture, Philippians 4:13 states; “I can do all things through Him who strengthen me.” ⁴As she grew more in spiritual maturity, God overflowed through the Holy Spirit into her, it overflowed into her congregants through this Christ-centered project and they will overflow into their families, and so on, and so on To God be the glory!

⁴ Phi. 4:13 (NRSV).

APPENDIX A

PROJECT EXPECTATIONS

PROJECT EXPECTATIONS

Throughout this process a Summary of Learning was required after every Intensive and Peer Session. God was transforming the Pastor in order to impart the Christ-centered relationship towards Marriage Model to her congregants in a loving and caring manner. The Pastor found out through discernment that she was the project and God had given her abundant grace and a prophetic understanding of being Christ-centered in order to assist those at Light of the Community Christian Church. The Intensives and Peer sessions gave an increasingly deeper and broader educational base, applying a less harsh overtone and a more compassionate and benevolent approach with her congregants. The Pastor was humbled and blessed throughout this journey while attending the opening chapel and plenary sessions. Thankfully, God continued to revitalize, renew, refresh and restore the project administrator who overflowed into the participants. This was the first project expectation which was a requirement of the Doctor of Ministry program.

The second expectation of this project was to measure attitudinal change in the participants pertaining to Christ-centered relationships and marriage. A third expectation was that Christian formation through the spiritual disciplines would empower them with a biblical foundation that could deepen and enrich their relationships. A fourth expectation was for the training to encourage participants toward practicing the spiritual disciplines to continue enhancing their spiritual formation.

APPENDIX B

AN EXAMPLE OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE TRAINING ACTIVITIES

First Session:

Statistics on Relationships and Marriage

- (1) Meal with Participants (Fellowship)
- (2) Contextual Associate – Prayer
- (3) Lectio Divina
 - (a) Origin of Lectio Divina
 - (i) Discussion & Introduction of Spiritual Disciplines: Bible Study, Prayer, Meditation & Reflection through Journaling
 - (ii) Discussion on Spiritual Formation
 - (b) Performed Lectio Divina focus:
 - (i) Read Psalms 138: 1-3, 7-8
 - (ii) Physical Relaxation/Quieting your Mind
 - (c) Reflection through Journaling
- (4) Instructor Personal Testimony on Why Marriage Matters
- (5) Statistical Data on Relationships and Marriage
 - (a) USA Marriage Rate 1990-2012 Timeline (statista.com/statistics)
 - (b) First Marriages in the United States (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: National Health Statistics Report)
 - (c) National Marriage/Divorce Rate Trends (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Vital Statistics System)
 - (d) Marriage and Divorce Statistics – (Barna Group New Marriage and Divorce Statistics Released)

- (e) Relationship Trends (Facts/Statistics about Single People –
unmarriedamerica).org
- (f) Family Growth (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Key Statistics
from the National Survey of Family Growth)
- (g) Marriage Facts and Figures – (foryourmarriage.org)
- (h) Cohabitation, Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage in the United States –
(Department of Health and Human Services/CDC Vital and Health Statistics)

Exercise:

Match couples from the Bible, such as Adam is married to Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Mary and Joseph, Queen Esther and King Ahaseurus, Judah and Tamar, etc. Discussion regarding marriage and relationships

Wrap-Up:

Final Thoughts

Benediction:

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, oh Lord, my strength and my redeemer, Amen.

Dismissal

Third Session:

Why Relationships/Marriages Fail

- (1) Meal with Participants (Fellowship)
- (2) Student Prayer
- (3) Lectio Divina
 - (a) Psalms 121: 1-8
 - (b) “God, the help of those who seek Him”
 - (c) Reflection through Journaling
- (4) Reasons Why Relationships/Marriages Fail
 - (a) Discussion John Gottman, *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail and How You Can make Yours Last* (Topics: Conflict: A Key to Happiness, Love and Respect, Criticism vs. Complaint, Separate Universes, Balancing Relationship, Knowing When to Get Help, Calm Down)
 - (b) Discussion Joseph W. Walker, III *Date With Destiny: Find the Love You Need* (Topics: Anticipate Greatness, God’s Hand is Upon You, Don’t Sit on it, Defining Moments)
 - (c) Discussion Gary Chapman, *The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love That, Lasts* (Topics: Loving the Unlovely, Words of Affirmation)

Exercises:

Couple Survival: Team up (2) participants, each couple must come up with five items they would take with them if they were to crash in an airplane and swim to a nearby island to live until help arrives.

Word Search: Find books in the Bible

Wrap-Up:

Final Thoughts

Benediction:

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, oh Lord, my strength and my redeemer, Amen.

Dismiss

Fourth Session:

Godly (Scriptural) Values for Christ-centered Relationships

- (1) Meal with Participants (Fellowship)
- (2) Student Prayer
- (3) Lectio Divina
 - (a) Psalms 100
 - (b) “Worship”
 - (c) Reflection through Journaling
- (4) Scriptural Values for Christ-centered Relationships, Including Celibacy
 - (a) Discussion Kenneth Hagin Jr *Built to Last: How to Build Strong and Lasting Relationships with God, Family, and Friends* (Relationships A Top Priority for Believers, Elements for a Healthy Relationship, A Covenant with God, Friends Forever)
 - (b) Discussion: Bible Verses regarding relationships, Psalm 19:4, Proverbs 17:27, Ephesians 4:26, Proverbs 14:29, Romans 12:19, 1Thessalonians 5:11, Proverbs 27:9, Proverbs 13:20
 - (c) Complication in Relationships (Sin, disobedience, domino effect, Genesis 3:1-4, 6, 13 and 24 (innocence lost, moved away from God); Abraham/Sarah/Hagar & Ishmael), Woman at the well (John 4: 7, 13-18), Tamar and Amnon (2 Sam 13: 1-2, 11-16)

Celibacy

Topic: How can Christians be intimate in relationships without engaging in sexual activity? Discussion celibacy as an option, spiritual intimacy, take time to learn to love, love is not sex

Exercises:

Pictionary: Draw pictures on white board involving items or things found in a wedding, students must figure out what is being drawn

Celibacy article: (USA Today, New York, May 23, 2015):

Marine and Bride: Discussion on Marine and Bride who did not have sex until their wedding night (May 23, 2015), they prayed together before they were married

Wrap-Up:

Final Thoughts

Benediction:

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, oh Lord, my strength and my redeemer, Amen.

Dismiss

APPENDIX C

PRE AND POST TESTS
QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

PRE & POST TEST QUESTIONS

Please rate the following statements candidly and honestly based upon your own experience, understanding, perception and beliefs. Write the numerical value of your choice response in the space following the statement. Each statement will be measured for compilation of the data at a later time. ***Thank you in advance for your participation and responses.***

NAME _____

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

**Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Somewhat Agree = 3,
Agree = 4, Strongly Agree = 5**

- 1) It is important for you and your partner to have a relationship with Jesus. _____
- 2) I should date and marry an individual that has a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. _____
- 3) Complications arise in relationships and marriages due to a lack of spiritually guided principles and a common focus on Christ. _____
- 4) Having faith in Jesus Christ makes issues and problems in my relationship seem surmountable. _____
- 5) The spiritual formation of relationships advances them toward a deeper affection and appreciation for God and each other. _____
- 6) My attitude toward commitment in a relationship should be based on Christian (biblical) values and not the worldly view. _____
- 7) Setting the sexual boundary of celibacy until marriage is important to me. _____
- 8) It is important to me that I teach my children, or the next generation be taught to re-establish Christ-centered relationships culminating in a Christ-centered marriage. _____
- 9) Marriage according to the Word of God is between a man and woman, intended by God for the development of the family as God's righteous seed. _____
- 10) Utilizing the spiritual disciplines of Bible study, prayer, journaling and reflection, and Christian meditation will lead to better relationships and the fulfillment of God's will relating to marriage. _____

Pre & Post Test Responses

Christ-Centered Relationships Toward Marriage Project

Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2,
Somewhat Agree = 3, Agree = 4, Strongly Agree = 5

Participant	<u>P1</u>	<u>P1</u>	<u>P1</u>	<u>P2</u>	<u>P2</u>	<u>P2</u>
<u>Survey:</u>	<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>variance</u>	<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>variance</u>
1)	5	5	0	3	5	+2
2)	5	5	0	2	5	+3
3)	3	5	+2	3	4	+1
4)	4	5	+1	3	4	+1
5)	4	5	+1	3	5	+2
6)	3	5	+2	4	5	+1
7)	4	4	0	3	4	+1
8)	5	5	0	4	4	0
9)	5	5	0	5	5	0
10)	4	3	-1	4	5	+1

Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2,
Somewhat Agree = 3, Agree = 4, Strongly Agree = 5

Participan	<u>P3</u>	<u>P3</u>	<u>P3</u>	<u>P4</u>	<u>P4</u>	<u>P4</u>
<u>Survey:</u>	<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>variance</u>	<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>variance</u>
1)	5	5	0	5	5	0
2)	5	5	0	4	5	+1
3)	2	3	+1	4	5	+1
4)	4	5	+1	5	5	0
5)	4	4	0	4	5	+1
6)	4	5	+1	3	5	+2
7)	3	3	0	5	5	0
8)	4	5	+1	4	5	+1
9)	5	5	0	4	5	+1
10)	3	5	+2	5	5	0

Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2,
Somewhat Agree = 3, Agree = 4, Strongly Agree = 5

Participant	<u>P5</u>	<u>P5</u>	<u>P5</u>	<u>P6</u>	<u>P6</u>	<u>P6</u>
<u>Survey:</u>	<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>variance</u>	<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>variance</u>
1)	4	5	+1	4	5	+1
2)	4	5	+1	4	5	+1
3)	3	4	+1	4	5	+1
4)	1	4	+3	2	5	+3
5)	4	4	0	3	5	+2
6)	4	4	0	5	5	0
7)	5	4	-1	4	5	+1
8)	5	4	-1	5	5	0
9)	4	4	0	5	5	0
10)	4	4	0	4	5	+1

*2 participants never showed for the pre-gathering or training.

*2 participants came for the pre-gathering and never came back for training

APPENDIX D

STUDENT AND CONTEXTUAL ASSOCIATE OBSERVATION FORM QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

CONTEXT ASSOCIATE/ STUDENT OBSERVATION FORM**Name**_____ **Date**_____

What were some of the observations which you made that stood out or impacted the training process in the following areas:

- A. When gathering for classes
- B. The Training
- C. Your classmates
- D. Materials provided
- E. Training facility
- F. Those providing instruction throughout the experience

The following are the student and Contextual Associate observations regarding the training: (In order to ensure privacy, Participant = P, Contextual Associate = CA, Instructor = I)

What were some of the observations which you made that stood out or impacted the training process in the following areas?

Question A. When gathering for classes:

- (P1) Facility was easy to find.
- (P2) Start on time, closed on time.
- (P3) Good group, though older in age, but all seemed eager to get started
- (P4) Always greeted with a warm hello, participants were excited to learn from instructor and each other.
- (P5) Course classes began on time.
- (P6) Lectio Divina, quiet time and journaling
- (CA) Students straggled in until a few minutes just after class. Most seemed happy to be a part and were seemingly ok with being here and learning together.
- (I) Some arrived early, some late, some left early.

Question B. The training:

- (P1) Well planned, thorough, organized, could have slowed down and allowed the training to be what it is; don't be so worried about time. Allow God to lead.
- (P2) Focus kept on class work, very interesting.
- (P3) Well-planned
- (P4) Strongly Bible focused, well-prepared lesson plans, approachable and
Light-hearted, yet firm

- (P5) Reading articles
- (P6) Informative with Christ centered information that enhanced each topic of discussion
- (CA) The training was interested, had a lot of aspects to it. Slightly confrontational at times but otherwise valuable. I really thought the scheduling went well because it was left up to the students to decide and was completed without objection in class periods over 5 weeks.
- (I) Comprehensible, understandable, have quite a bit of information to impart in a short time.

Question C. Your classmates:

- (P1) Everyone was able to participate, all participants were engaged.
- (P2) God like
- (P3) Enjoyable – like minded.
- (P4) Nice cross sector of ages are relationship history, friendly and open to differing viewpoints.
- (P5) Participants should reflect targeted audience.
- (P6) Kind, courteous, good, participants, helpful, encouragers
- (CA) They seemingly had fun along the way and throughout. At times, one or two seemed preoccupied and confrontational on the subject being discussed.

Everybody got along well and I believe everybody learned something.
- (I) Some where distracted by their cell phones, most were very attentive.

Question D. Materials provided:

- (P1) There could have been more notes provided.
- (P2) Plenty and all were interesting
- (P3) Well done, would have liked to have viewed a short video/DVD of materials talked about.
- (P4) Effective, informative!
- (P5) Handouts-helpful, Make certain sources are credible.
- (P6) Good information that can be used, shared, and put into practice in my daily life.
- (CA) There were a lot of handouts with Scripture that dealt with marriage and relationships. The materials were shared and some presented and helped to keep the class interesting.
- (I) Excellent, handouts were given, an outline of every class was passed to students and each received a daily agenda.

Question E. Training facility:

- (P1) Excellent.
- (P2) Church clean, very quiet.
- (P3) Accessible for all.
- (P4) Spacious, welcoming.
- (P5) Convenient.
- (P6) Comfortable, clean, cool, conducive to learning.
- (CA) The facility was beautiful and clean, and nicely kept. It was very convenient in location.

- (I) Great, easy to locate, location was near a bus stop, it was handicap accessible, quiet and spacious.

Question F. Those providing instruction throughout the experience:

- (P1) Knowledgeable and prepared.
- (P2) Very knowledgeable.
- (P3) Spiritual, excited about God's work
- (P4) Excellent!
- (P5) Growing in knowledge and awareness of topic
- (P6) Excellent instructor, who allowed students to express opinions, allowed readers, encouraged participation, never criticized any answers, constructive methods.
- (CA) I believe Rev. Barnes-Jackson did a great job of presenting the material throughout and
- think it would be great to continue as a presenter of this material at a later time.
- (I) Thoughtful, encouraging, a good listener, energetic and respectful.

APPENDIX E

PROJECT TRAINING EVALUATION FORM
QUESTIONS AND REPSONSES

PROJECT TRAINING EVALUATION FORM

Name _____ Date _____

1. Tell me what you personally thought about the Christ-centered Relationship Toward Marriage training classes?
2. What impact did the spiritual formation training classes have on you?
3. What result do you believe the spiritual disciplines on prayer, meditation, Bible study, and reflection through journaling have on the group participants?
4. Would you recommend this training on Christ-centered Relationships Toward Marriage to another individual? Why or why not?
5. How would you evaluate the effectiveness of the instructors and the training as a whole? Please explain.
6. Was the meal provided for each session a help?
7. Did you have need of the Baby Sitting? If so, how did it impact your training?
8. Did you learn something new?
9. What would you change, if anything for future training?
10. Are you more likely to make different decisions based upon the training received during the six sessions?

PROJECT TRAINING EVALUATION FORM RESPONSES

The following are the student, Contextual Associate and Instructor responses to the training: (In order to ensure privacy, Participant = P, Contextual Associate = CA and Instructor = I)

1. Tell me what you personally thought about the Christ-centered Relationship Toward Marriage training classes?

(P-1) I wasn't sure of all that I was getting myself involved in but I'm glad that I was Asked to join and participate.

(P-2) A good class for any person planning to marry.

(P-3) Informative, leader was well prepared – uplifted!

(P-4) I found the classes extremely eye-opening and enlightening with a great assortment of educational sheets and activities.

(P-5) Enlightening.

(P-6) I feel that my thoughts have changed about many topics that were discussed, positively.

(CA) I thought they were great and informative.

(I) The classes were informative and some topics had never been utilized for some of the participants, such as Lectio Divina. Subject matter was well received. When touching upon the topic of celibacy and same-sex marriage, there was a small debate, but all done in order and respect for every opinion. Time was an issue for five of the participants and one had no time constraints. I feel to some degree that feel transformation took place within each participant

2. What impact did the spiritual formation training classes have on you?

- (P-1) I am able to have more meaningful conversation with my boyfriend.
- (P-2) Think twice, even for friendship.
- (P-3) Being single, not at this present time, but if/when and if I do, will certainly refer to the info given as a guide/model to live by.
- (P-4) The impact was profound. So many important biblical truths were shared and expressed.
- (P-5) Additional focus on Biblical Scripture .
- (P-6) Attitude changed because of past relationship, realized I was at fault by not having Christ at the center.
- (CA) It helped me to see the need to continue presenting and emphasizing the need for Christ-centered relationships and marriage.
- (I) Continue to be more prayerful and engage the conversation regarding Christ-centered relationships toward marriage.

3. What result do you believe the spiritual disciplines on prayer, meditation, Bible study, and reflection through journaling have on the group participants?

- (SP-1) They all have given up something to think about, provide more opportunity to communicate w/God differently.
- (SP-2) A positive impact.
- (SP-3) Extremely seemed to change hearts as the weeks went by.
- (SP-4) I feel the spiritual disciplines .
- (SP-5) It really affected me because it gave me a little more insight about Bible study, prayer and meditation.

- (SP-6) About praying; people must pray every day, fast and be in the spirit when you fast and pray.
- (CA) The session on prayer had a great response and people were praying that always had a problem with prayer. It was uplifting. Meditation was a good session. The students appreciated the training, due to the high stress level in their personal life, they were able to take away techniques to help calm them down. Fasting and humility was not quite as fascinating for the students. They were able to learn about how to fast and why people fast. Humility brought out some questions, they did not seem so interested, but I feel they left more knowledgeable on both subjects. Bible study session was encouraging. Some of the students obtained information on why Bible study is so important, such as, if they do not attend Bible study or learn more about the bible, it is much harder for them to be a witness. Class on service was fine. The group understood that service is key for development in their spiritual journey.
- (I-2) I believe the training was informative and helpful, taking each student participant to a better understanding of the subject matter. I observed that each student was attentive in their learning with the exception of one who seemed distracted at times. Each person seemed to digest the material, and continually asked questions throughout, so I believe the group will be impacted to some degree. However, I view that it will take much more training for the impact to present a major change on the group as a whole. I observed that individually they enjoyed being together in that learning environment, but making the commitment to continue learning may be a problem.

4. Would you recommend this training on Christ-centered Relationships Toward Marriage to another individual? Why or why not?

- (P-1) Yes, to learn some of the things that can be done to keep a relationship positive.
- (P-2) Yes, classes should be a part of both bride and groom.
- (P-3) Yes, a young couple for guidance.
- (P-4) Yes, I would recommend this training to others because of its roots in biblical truth.
- (P-5) Yes, if applicable.
- (P-6) Yes, so that they can see how their marriage is or is not Christ centered.
- (CA) Yes, I believe the training is and will be valuable to help in relationship and marriages.
- (I) Yes, we need to get the word out on marriage and how important it is to God!

5. How would you evaluate the effectiveness of the instructors and the training as a whole? Please explain.

- (P-1) The training was very effective, it has helped me to have better conversations with my boyfriend and has helped me to understand things that I could do better to keep our relationship positive.
- (P-2) Very good.
- (P-3) Wholeheartedly thought out and encouraging to others.
- (P-4) The instructor was the training as a whole and was very effective. The tutelage was certainly grounded in study of various Scripture, but the instructor did not stop there. The instructor readily encouraged discussion and ideas from other perspectives.

- (P-5) Rating 1-5 (5) Strongly Agree, satisfied 4- Preparedness, effective and assistive.
- (P-6) The instructor was effective by providing many materials, using Scripture for back up, researched materials.
- (CA) She was great, presented the material, had discussions and responded to questions.
- (I) The scheduling of classes went very well. Everyone was able to be flexible and considerate of one another. Training materials were extremely helpful and the students did not have to take as many notes due to having copies of presented material. The instructor was well prepared for the task. If there was a question asked and the instructor did not have the answer, an answer was found and imparted to the individual on the next class session.

6. Was the meal provided for each session a help?

- (P-1) Yes.
- (P-2) Yes, helped students talk and get to know each other.
- (P-3) Yes.
- (P-4) It really was an added plus for me, I would not have time to stop and eat prior to Training, very thoughtful.
- (P-5) Yes, thank you.
- (P-6) Yes, those coming directly from work needed time to eat and share the meal.
- (CA) I thought it was very helpful, we didn't have to worry about being hungry.
- (I) Yes, although all participants did not partake of the meal at every session. For the last session, everyone bought in a dish to share with one another.

7. Did you have need of the Baby Sitting? If so, how did it impact your training?

[P-(1-6)]

None of the students had need for a babysitter, although one was on stand-by just in case.

(CA) No.

(I) Some of the participants at the pre-gathering session had a need for babysitting, However, the ones in need of a sitter did not complete the training.

8. Did you learn something new?

(P-1) Yes.

(P-2) Yes, marriage works, keep Christ in it.

(P-3) Yes, all things are new when unknown to you.

(P-4) Certainly did, the Lectio Divina was calming and allowed me time to really delve into the decisions I have made and reflect on how good God has been to me and my family. It allowed me to learn how to remain calm and meditate on God's word when I face challenging situations.

(P-5) New – enhanced meaning of scriptural relevance.

(P-6) Yes, many statistics that were shared about our country compared to others around the world.

(CA) Yes, the fact that Christ is a must in our relationships.

(I) The Lectio Divina was new to all the participants. It was interesting to see how involved they became after the first day. The statistics provided startling results on how many babies are born to unwed mothers and the variation between the

amount of marriages and divorce rates. Reasons why relationships and marriage fail were of relevance to the participants. Discussion on same-sex marriage and partners was interesting, and keeping everyone respectful of all opinions was done properly. Some of the participants were able to communicate more effectively than prior to the project which made the instructor feel great. The spiritual disciplines were a major headliner for the participants, they really enjoyed the journaling and meditation was valuable tool as well.

9. What would you change, if anything for future training?

- (P-1) Don't be concerned with time constraints. Allow the info to be shared without feeling rushed.
- (P-2) N/A.
- (P-3) Participants younger in age and unmarried couples dating.
- (P-4) The only thing I would change is the time constraints. It would be a great weekend course, maybe at a resort and no one would have a problem with time.
- (P-5) Audience representation.
- (P-6) All was informative.
- (CA) I would structure the classes a little more.
- (I) More time per session, perhaps four sessions instead of six at two and one-half hours per session.

10. Are you more likely to make different decisions based upon the training received during the six sessions?

- (P-1) Yes.

- (P-2) Yes, never get married again without Christ being centered in my relationship first.
- (P-3) I would share this info to young people at my youth group in church.
- (P-4) Most assuredly, after learning about the spiritual disciplines and incorporating them into my life, I know for sure I would make different decisions after attending this training.
- (P-5) I already have awareness of personal decisions; however course strengthened biblical relevance.
- (P-6) Yes, my next relationship will be based on Christ and his teachings, only.
- (CA) Yes, first I will get a better of understanding of God's will pertaining to relationships and marriage, then continue to teach it to others.
- (I) Absolutely! Look more closely at people's relationships and be more inviting when it comes to witnessing about marriage and how it matters to God.

APPENDIX F

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I, _____ understand and consent to being a participant in the Christ-centered Relationship Toward Marriage project held by Rev. Pamela Jackson for Light of the Community Church (DOC).

I acknowledge that Rev. Pamela Jackson has explained the details of the project which includes six classes or meeting sessions also, pre and post testing, student evaluation and student observation forms to be completed. She also explained that each session will be held for one and a half hours and require a commitment of my presence in each session for the **full duration of the project** in order for the data to be valid for use in the project.

I agree to participate and commit to assisting by being present in each session throughout its duration. My participation is voluntary. I also consent to and give my permission for Rev. Barnes-Jackson to use my responses to any surveys, forms, evaluations and other media and/or recordings of sessions with information pertaining to results of my attendance and participation in this project, as she completes her doctor of Ministry project. I am aware that all information will be provided without identifying the participant.

Please Print Your Name

Date

Please Sign Your Name

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!

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